

Some Observations on Wordsworth's
Achievement in Sonnet

Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of English
of Rhodes University

by

Linette Reay Gubb

July 1982

To Wordsworth

Wordsworth I love, his books are like the fields,
Not filled with flowers, but works of human kind;
The pleasant weed a fragrant pleasure yields,
The briar and broomwood shaken by the wind,
The thorn and bramble o'er the water shoot
A finer flower than gardens e'er gave birth,
The aged huntsman grubbing up the root—
I love them all as tenants of the earth:
Where genius is, there often die the seeds;
What critics throw away I love the more;
I love to stoop and look among the weeds,
To find a flower I never knew before;
Wordsworth, go on—a greater poet be;
Merit will live, though parties disagree!

John Clare 1840-1

CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements	iv
Text and Abbreviations	vii
Chapter I: A short History of the Sonnet from its origins to Wordsworth	1
Chapter II: Wordsworth's Sonnets : 1802-1820	43
Chapter III: The Sequences	88
I. <u>The River Duddon</u>	92
II. <u>Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820</u> . .	118
III. <u>Ecclesiastical Sonnets</u>	135
Chapter IV: Sonnets after 1820	158
I. On Poetry	165
II. On Mutability, Ageing and Time	192
Select Bibliography	205

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study seeks to give a perspective on Wordsworth's achievement in sonnet, taking into account all the sonnets he wrote, from the outburst of sonneteering in 1802 to the final decade (1840-1850). My chief concern has been to trace Wordsworth's handling of form and theme throughout his poetic career. A subordinate but related concern has been to try to show that Wordsworth's powers do not diminish after 1815, a date which is sometimes regarded as marking the beginning of the poet's "decline". Wordsworth's skill in blank verse and ⁱⁿ other types of lyric is widely acknowledged; his dexterity in the sonnet form is less well recognized or thought to be limited to fewer poems (usually those of the earlier years) than there actually are. As a result, his performance in sonnet is sometimes underestimated, there being more sonnet concerns and structural patterns than the well-known few reflect. It is possible that Wordsworth's own ambiguous attitude to the genre as expressed in his prose writings, together with his insistence that his sonnets were not amongst the best of his poems, has helped to foster such a view. His practice in sonnet, however, proves that his genius is as evident in some of these poems as it is elsewhere, whether he esteemed them less or not.

In order to support my claim that Wordsworth's powers in sonnet do not decline over the years and to illustrate shifts of thematic and structural emphases, the poems are examined in an arrangement that takes into account the order of composition. The study is introduced, in Chapter I, with a brief history of the form from the time of its European origins through its major achievements up to Wordsworth's adoption of the genre. An attempt is made in this chapter to arrive at some definition of the nature of sonnet, especially of the Petrarchan type favoured by Wordsworth. Chapter II discusses Wordsworth's occasional sonnets composed between 1802 and 1820. It first briefly considers the legitimacy and value of a study of the sonnets separated from the rest of Wordsworth's poetry. The sonnets are judged to be characteristic of much of the poet's thought and attitudes, and they provide a manageable body of material from which to measure his poetic powers in his early poems against those of his advancing years.

This chapter then considers how, during the period 1802-1820, Milton's influence is seen to be strongest. Initially in apprenticeship to the seventeenth-century poet, Wordsworth gradually develops sonnet patterns and themes that differ from those that first inspired him and becomes progressively less dependent on the Miltonic model. His own innovations are advanced in the sequences, three of which are examined in Chapter III: The River Duddon, Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820 and Ecclesiastical Sonnets. These works were composed for the most part between 1818 and 1822 during which time the poet devoted his greatest energy to the sequence as a genre. Chapter IV offers an analysis of some of the sonnets written after 1820 which are representative of Wordsworth's chief sonnet undertakings in the later years. Two areas of topic emerge from this period. The first has to do with the business of poetry, its subjects and function and the sonnet genre itself; the second discusses the themes of mutability, ageing and time, topics which occupied the poet more than any other at this stage of his life.

It will be noted that some of the famous sonnets like "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" and "The world is too much with us; late and soon" have not been examined in any depth in this study. These sonnets have been justly dealt with by critics and are generally agreed upon to be among the poet's masterpieces. There are many others in the rich and varied sonnet oeuvre that are as valuable and significant for an appraisal of Wordsworth's poetry, and it is upon sonnets such as these, especially those which have not been given much critical attention, that I have chiefly focussed. I would not wish to imply that all the sonnets discussed have the same poetical merit; on the other hand, none of those considered seems to me inferior.

Two points in connection with the text used in this study and its editor need to be made. The standard edition, The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, is currently out of print and copies of the five volumes are difficult to get hold of. Of those which have been available for my use, Volumes I and III are unrevised editions (1940 and 1946 respectively), and Volumes II, IV and V have been revised (1952, 1958 and 1959). I have judged it better to use this edition throughout, rather than combine it with separate volumes of the as yet uncompleted Cornell

Wordsworth. It should also be noted that the spelling of "de Selincourt" in the various works that he has edited is not always consistent. Variations of this spelling have been indicated in the footnotes and bibliography.

The conventions of bibliographical style used in this thesis are those recommended by the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (New York: MLA, 1977) except where it is necessary to conform to British conventions of spelling and punctuation.

I should like to express my gratitude to Miss Ruth Harnett for her encouraging and enlightening supervision. I wish also to express my thanks to Dr J.S. Gouws for the use of his library, to the Staff of the Rhodes University Library, and to Mrs H. Wells for typing the manuscript.

TEXT AND ABBREVIATIONS

The text used in this study is that of The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, in 5 volumes, edited by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press). Vol. I (1940); Vol. III (1946); Vols. II, IV and V, rev. ed. (1952-59). For a sonnet, "When slow from pensive twilight's latest gleams", not published in this edition, and for a chronological view of the poems, I have used: William Wordsworth : Poems, in 2 volumes, edited by John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

List of abbreviations in footnotes:

- PWO The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire.
- EL The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805), ed. E. de Selincourt.
- MY The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth : The Middle Years, ed. E. de Selincourt.
- LY The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth : The Later Years, ed. E. de Selincourt.
- Prelude (Maxwell) William Wordsworth : The Prelude, ed. J.C. Maxwell.
- Wordsworth : Poems William Wordsworth : Poems, ed. John O. Hayden.
- D.W. Journals Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt.
- Moorman, LY William Wordsworth : A Biography, The Later Years, 1803-1850, by Mary Moorman.
- H.C.R.: Books and Their Writers Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley.

CHAPTER I

On an afternoon in May 1802 Wordsworth wrote three sonnets, the first - with the exception of six youthful quatorzains - of over five hundred that were to be written during the rest of his poetic career which ended in about 1846. In his own words, he "took fire" from a reading by his sister Dorothy of Milton's sonnets (which he knew by heart).¹ This event is of the first importance in the history of the sonnet as it signalled an alteration in Wordsworth's view of the form, and launched him on a sonnet-writing course that, if only by virtue of the number it produced, suggests that the change in attitude was a permanent one. Twenty years after the incident, in a letter to W.S. Landor, April 20, 1822, he wrote: "I used to think it [the sonnet] egregiously absurd", and in the same letter he expressed a dissatisfaction with the form: "[S]ince that time [May 21], and from want of resolution to take up anything of length, I have filled up many a moment in writing Sonnets, which, if I had never fallen into the practice, might easily have been better employed."² But he continued to use the form a great deal. The sonnets that he wrote both before and after 1822 bear testimony to the fact that the need which the form had met in the poet did not disappear after the first outbreak of sonnet writing, and that it was not a temporary impulse that Milton had given to him. The excellence that is to be found in many of his sonnets, including those of the later years, is confirmation that Wordsworth remained strongly attracted to the genre and that it received his careful attention to the last.

One of the most striking aspects of Wordsworth's treatment and usage of the sonnet is the complete change of attitude that occurred when, almost midway through his life as a writer, he first perceived

¹The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 417, I.F. note; hereafter cited as PWO.

²The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth : The Later Years, 1821-30, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), I, 71; hereafter cited as LY.

the excellence of Milton's sonnets and became inspired by them. Yet we must look beyond Milton in an effort to understand, not only the sudden attraction of the form for Wordsworth, but also the powerful nature and capabilities of the sonnet itself which Wordsworth, like so many of the great poets, turned to as a mode of expression. In Wordsworth's adoption of the form we have a particularly interesting instance of this historical phenomenon. The fact that a poet takes up a form he has consciously repudiated until he is well into his career as a writer invites an examination of the genre itself and its suitability to his poetic character. We learn about the sonnet by investigating its origins and history, and in order to formulate a significant study of Wordsworth's use of the form, it seems advisable to start with those origins and briefly to trace the development of the genre to the Miltonic version, the source of his apparently sudden inspiration.

The origins of the sonnet are not entirely clear. The term which derives from the Italian sonetto, a little song or sound, was used imprecisely in early times, and early sonnet theoreticians and critics do not appear to agree on the sources of the form. An authority on the origins of the sonnet, E.H. Wilkins, discusses several such theories, one being that it began as Sicilian folksong, the form emerging from the addition of a double refrain of six lines (two tercets) to a sung stanza of two quatrains. This eight-line stanza matches in every detail the Sicilian strambotto, a stanza which is generally believed to be the origin of the sonnet octave. Both the strambotto and the first extant sonnet octave consist of eight hendecasyllables, and each rhymes abababab. According to Wilkins, the earliest manuscripts dating from about 1300 show that the octave was written in four lines, a distich to a line, with a capital letter or an introductory sign beginning each distich. The sestet was divided into tercets, each tercet occupying a line and a half.³ He argues that the scribal practice of the day indicates that the distich structure is essential in both the strambotto and the octave, and that a subordinate quatrain division is present in each:

³E.H. Wilkins, "The Invention of the Sonnet", Modern Philology, 13 (1915), 467-74.

In the strambotto the distich is the musical unit : the melody of the first distich is repeated for each subsequent distich. In the strambotto, moreover, there is always a pause in sense at the end of the fourth line, and this pause is marked, in the singing, by a considerable rest for the voice : in the sonnet there was presumably, from the start, a conscious tendency to divide the octave, in sense, into two quatrains.⁴

Wilkins discounts the theory, however, that the sestet is derived from a six-line strambotto on the grounds that it would then be rhymed cdcddc, a rhyme scheme which, in conjunction with the abababab of the octave, would, according to him, result in a monotony of rhyme that could destroy the delicate asymmetry of the sonnet, and exclude any real need for an octave-sestet division.⁵ (Generally this may be true, and alternating rhymes throughout may not be a desirable rhyme scheme, but Wilkins's statement needs modifying in the light of Thomas Gray's fine "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West"⁶ which is successfully rhymed in just this way.) But whether the sestet came into being independently of any example, as Wilkins believes, or whether it resulted from a change in tune in the musical setting, there was present the tendency to introduce something different in the last six lines, a tendency that encouraged a change in rhyme scheme such as most of these sonnets display.

To be aware of the distich pattern in the earliest sonnets is to recognize the existence of a double pattern or structure in the octave : the quatrain division subordinate to a series of distiches. This potential of the sonnet to superimpose one pattern on another, a potential which grows as the form develops and which gives a form already extremely precise and definite an even tighter organization, is thus present from the start.

The first group of sonnets known to us belonged to the poets of the court of Frederick II. They were probably written in the first half of the thirteenth century - possibly between 1215 and 1250 - a

⁴Wilkins, p.478.

⁵Wilkins, pp.476 and 480.

⁶The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray : English, Latin and Greek, ed. H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p.92.

period in which the arts in general flourished at the Frederician court. Most of these poems are attributed to Giacomo da Lentino and the rest to his contemporaries. All rhyme abababab in the octave, with cde,cde as the most popular sestet rhyme scheme, and in each there is a pause at the conclusion of line 8.⁷ The formal division of octave and sestet, then, indicated by a change in rhyme scheme and a pause, is present in the earliest extant sonnets.

The subject of the first sonnets is love. Wilkins has pointed out that all except one are about love in one form or another, expressed in terms that are essentially courtly in nature.⁸ The poet's love for another, the nature of love, friendship, and personal tribute - all themes of these early compositions - are sonnet topics that are readily associated with a nobility of style and a seriousness of feeling which we have come to expect of sonnet. Yet worth noting is that Dante, writing about the relative nobility of the three lyric forms of his day, in De Vulgari Eloquentia, Bk II, Ch.iii., regards the canzone as the most elevated, and puts the ballata next, and the sonnet last.⁹ Wilkins, who considers the sonnet to be lighter in tone than the canzone, sees in this view of Dante's an indication that the sonnet is the descendant, in part anyway, of a popular form, one which looks back to the Sicilian strambotto.

Enclosing rhyme (abba abba) in the octave replaced alternating rhyme when the Tuscan Guitone d' Arezzo, whose sonnets were written after those of the Frederician poets, established the type that was to become the classical Petrarchan form.¹⁰ First Dante and then Petrarch gave to the form a definite shape and a distinct character, thereby establishing the sonnet as a traditional genre early in its history.

⁷This information on early sonnet form is based on the following: John Fuller, The Sonnet, The Critical Idiom, No.26 (London: Methuen, 1972), p.1; Sidney Lee, ed., Elizabethan Sonnets (London: Constable, 1904), I, xiii; J.S. Smart, The Sonnets of Milton (1921; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp.2-3; Wilkins, p.463.

⁸Wilkins, p.477.

⁹Wilkins, p.478.

¹⁰Fuller, p.4.

Dante, writing in the mid-thirteenth century, dedicated his Vita Nuova - a series of thirty-one lyrical poems connected by passages of prose - to his loved one, Beatrice. Twenty-five of these poems are regular quatorzains and "in manner and matter he sounded the key-note of the sonnet of the Renaissance".¹¹ Like Petrarch's, his topic is Platonic love. Petrarch's three hundred and seventeen sonnets, arranged in two sequences, are addressed to Laura, two hundred and twenty-seven having been written during her lifetime and ninety after her death. Introduced at irregular intervals in each sequence are other forms of lyrical verse including the ballata and canzone, but it is the sonnet that is the lyrical focus of Dante's sequence. A few of the sonnets turn away from adoration of the beloved to expression of political feeling, or are addressed to a friend or patron; and, in the second sequence a number are strongly religious. But the dominant topic is courtly love.¹²

In the Petrarchan sonnet the material and spiritual worlds (the outer and inner life respectively) are seen to exist in a harmony which springs from the relationship that is formed between nature and the human spirit. This is not the same as Wordsworth's theme of Man as "An inmate of this active universe" (The Prelude II. 254):¹³ the reciprocity between spirit and Nature is for him a communion of the human mind and the natural world that is productive of creativity and mystical experience. For these writers it is the woman who is the source of mystic contemplation, and, as J.W. Lever expresses it, it is a belief "in a fundamental rapport between nature and the human spirit, and in woman as the mystic channel through which this passed"¹⁴ that is at the centre of the romance tradition. Nature and heaven jointly create the woman and it is thus through her physical attributes that the divine can be contemplated. Lever adds that the outer and inner worlds "were made to interpenetrate at every point; spiritual states

¹¹ Lee, I, xiii.

¹² Lee, I, xiv-xviii.

¹³ William Wordsworth : The Prelude, ed. J.C. Maxwell, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.87; hereafter cited as Prelude (Maxwell).

¹⁴ J.W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London: Methuen, 1956), p.7.

and natural phenomena became dual aspects of an integral, visionary truth".¹⁵

Conceits were invented to give expression to this truth, and were based on a wide range of literary models. Petrarch, for example, was a classical scholar and allusions to the works of classical writers appear frequently in his sonnets. These conceits were taken over by sonneteers in the parts of the world to which the genre spread, to appear initially in translations and in imitations of the Italian writers, and then in the poet's original work where they are employed in the traditional manner and redirected. Petrarch, writing about Laura, popularized a blend of courtly love and idealism, imparting to his sonnets both the tone of the romantic Italian tradition and a depth of feeling which brought to perfection the sonnet kind (i.e., the love sonnet) that earlier writers had begun. Wordsworth, whose poetry arose largely out of his personal experience of the primary world, and to whom symbolism (of this sort) was not a concern, appeared to doubt the sincerity of the Italian poet:

Is it not in fact obvious that many of his love verses must have flowed, I do not say from a wish to display his own talent, but from a habit of exercising his intellect in that way rather than from an impulse of his heart? It is otherwise with his Lyrical Poems, and particularly with the one upon the degradation of his country : there he pours out his reproaches, lamentations, and aspirations like an ardent and sincere Patriot.¹⁶

The fact is that Wordsworth had no use for the range of metaphors which were evolved to glorify the celebration of this kind of love. He composed few love sonnets and the inaccessible Lady and unrequited love have no special place in his poetry. Yet there is a certain spiritual affinity between the two poets, as there is between Petrarch and Shakespeare, that ought not to be ignored : Wordsworth, writing of Petrarch in the tract "The Convention of Cintra", is in one respect writing of himself:

... I shall conclude with the words of a man of disciplined spirit, who withdrew from the too busy world - not out of indifference to its welfare, or to forget its concerns -

¹⁵Lever, p.5.

¹⁶PWO, III, 490; I.F. note.

but retired for wider compass of eye-sight, that he might comprehend and see in just proportions and relations; knowing above all that he, who hath not first made himself master of the horizon of his own mind, must look beyond it only to be deceived.¹⁷

Petrarch's dedication to the ennoblement of poetry and the inspiration he appeared to find at his retreat in the natural surroundings of the Vaucluse Valley are what win these praises from the later poet, not the subject of his sonnets, nor the complex apparatus of images and conceits that he used to elevate that subject.

Yet Wordsworth was to employ some of these images in his sonnets in a number of interesting ways. By extending the possibilities of theme and therefore of metaphor, Shakespeare in his sonnets prepares the way for Wordsworth to redirect some Elizabethan conventions and imagery, and by his use of some traditional traits, to make his own particular contribution to freeing the sonnet from what became time-worn conventions. In Sonnet VII of the River Duddon series, for example, "Change me, some God, into that breathing rose!",¹⁸ he is both rejecting the ideas and the imagery of the spurned love, and perpetuating them. He employs the image of the "love-sick Stripling" who desires to be an object imprisoned by his mistress' proximity to give expression to his preference for the love of Nature and of freedom: the poet would join his voice to the voices of Nature rather than to those human ones which celebrate a woman.

Wordsworth composed three sonnets addressed to Sleep. In "Fond words have oft been spoken to thee, Sleep!" he takes over the Petrarchan conceit of the sleeplessness induced by a hopeless love, and, entreating Sleep to visit the speaker, employs natural images to extol the "Balm that tames / All anguish...", proclaiming an affinity with his predecessors:

Shall I alone,
I surely not a man ungently made,
Call thee worst Tyrant by which Flesh is crost?¹⁹

¹⁷The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, 342.

¹⁸PWO, III, 248-49.

¹⁹PWO, III, 8.

Various others of these sets of images (some of which will be referred to in a later chapter) Wordsworth employs in a new way in his poetry. In "'With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the sky'",²⁰ the moon, an image of unhappy love in Sidney's sonnet,²¹ is used literally, as Wordsworth's appearances of Nature generally are; but its source, identifiable in the quotation from the Elizabethan poem and reinforced later by a reference to classical mythology, is the inspiration of the Romantic sonnet. Similarly, in sonnets XXXI and XXXII of Miscellaneous Sonnets, Part I, "Where lies the Land to which yon Ship must go?" and "With Ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh", the vessel is a literal one, not a figurative vehicle for the progress of the speaker (or unrequited lover). There is a love situation, but it bears no relationship to the manner in which the ship image is commonly used to celebrate love in the Petrarchan and Elizabethan quatorzains. In sonnet XXXII it can be seen that the poet loves the ship itself:

This Ship was nought to me, nor I to her,
Yet I pursued her with a Lover's look;
This Ship to all the rest did I prefer: 22

The act of singling out one ship from the rest places the speaker in the position of a lover, yet he remains on a level of literal description. The symbolic may well arise from the literal (as it often does in Wordsworth's poetry), but not in the Petrarchan fashion. Yet the image of the ship is traditional sonnet material which may possibly be the antecedent for the image of this Romantic poem. That Wordsworth had the earlier writers in mind is evident from the allusion in lines 5 - 8 to Skelton's Bowge of Court, 36 - 38:

Methought I saw a shippe, goodly of sayle
Come saylinge forth into that haven brood,
Her tackelynge ryche, and of hye apparayle. 23

All of these features then - and more - find a place in the sonnets of the poet who benefitted from and enlarged upon the heritage of the Italian Petrarch.

²⁰ PWO, III, 31-32.

²¹ The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p.180.

²² PWO, III, 18.

²³ PWO, III, 424.

While some formal aspects of the Petrarchan sonnet form are obvious, it is difficult to define sonnet essence. W.P. Ker terms it "the secret of life" itself. In answer to the questions he poses : "Why has the sonnet thriven? Why is it used by so many of the greatest poets?" he has this to say:

It is because the sonnet is a form of thought; the abstract sonnet has the power of captivating the mind like the abstract epic. Poets who use the sonnet feel that with that form their thought may have just that variety and unity which is the secret of life.²⁴

Ker believes that the sonnet arose to meet the need posed by this form of thought : the octave which projects the subject is followed by the sestet which contradicts, offers variety to, or resolves the problem set out in the first part. The variety and unity appear to spring from this form of thought expressed as it is by the structure of the sonnet : a contrast of two stages, two images, two moods or two positions, related to form a unity which the fourteen lines of the poem seem so eminently suitable a length to contain. Ker continues:

The sonnet fails when it is monotonous. The sonnet is not a mere stanza; it is at least a double thing, with position in it and contradiction. It is a true argument. In the Italian sonnet there is obviously a form provided for a position in the first eight lines, and a contradiction or variation or conclusion in the last six.²⁵

These last remarks apply mainly to Petrarchan sonnet, of course, as Ker himself observes, in pointing out that the Shakespearean type does not reflect this thought-form so obviously,²⁶ but it should be noted that even then they do not always fit the case. Some successful poems, claiming to be sonnets, do not show a distinct "doubleness" of argument, especially the kind built on contrast. Among such poems are some late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century descriptive sonnets, Milton's "On the late Massacre in Piedmont", and a few of Wordsworth's own.²⁷ Of these, and, indeed, of others, it could be

²⁴W.P. Ker, Form and Style in Poetry, ed. R.W. Chambers (1928; rpt. London: MacMillan, 1966), p.173.

²⁵Ker, p.173.

²⁶Ker, p.174.

²⁷See for example Wayside Sonnets 1750-1850, ed. Edmund Blunden and Bernard Mellor (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1971), William

said that a submerged doubleness is present (even though it might sometimes not fall into the octave-sestet pattern). Wordsworth's "Flowers" (The River Duddon, VI) is just one example of a sonnet in which there is no overt doubleness, but where a shift in perspective - from general description of natural objects to the specific mention of individual flowers - could be interpreted as a doubling of a kind that complicates the straight line of approach; even though the poem is, in one sense, purely descriptive. The fact that it is extremely difficult to define sonnet bears repeating here, however, and it should also be added that, whereas doubleness or some complexity of this kind would seem to be a feature of all successful sonnet, it may not be the essential element. However, some purists would exclude some poems that claim to be sonnets, or would regard them as imperfect as sonnets, if two positions were not obviously present. It is, at any rate, probably true to say that until the eighteenth century anyway, doubleness of the kind that Ker is talking about is almost always present in the Petrarchan type.

Ker has pointed out that the sonnet fails when it is without variation, such as a stanza might be, and that it is "at least a double thing". Paul Fussell, Jr., writing about the structural principles of the sonnet, takes this point further:

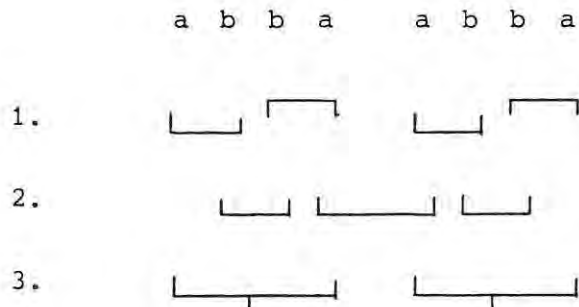
Structurally, the Petrarchan sonnet consists of three parts (two quatrains and the sestet) which underlie an unbalanced bipartite shape (octave and sestet). The sonnet's structural identity lies in just this imbalance: the first eight lines constitute a weightier quantitative unit than the last six : if the two parts of the sonnet were equal in number of lines, the form would risk the dullness of perfect symmetry - of a painting whose main effect occurs exactly in the center, for example, or of a line unrelieved by any hint of crookedness or deviation from geometrical exactitude. The poet who understands the sonnet form is the one who has developed an instinct for exploiting the principle of imbalance.²⁸

Allingham, "On a Forenoon of Spring", p.3; Josiah Conder, "Summer", p.20; Thomas Edwards, "Imitated from the Spanish of Lopez de Vega", p.28; William Sotheby, "The Winter's Morn", p.89; "The Snail", Anon., p.110. The Poems of John Milton, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London: Longmans, 1968), pp.411-12. PWO, III, "A Parsonage in Oxfordshire" (no.VII), 41-42; Brugès (no.III), 165; The River Duddon II, 246-47; VI, 248; XXVIII, 258.

²⁸ Paul Fussell, Jr., Poetic Meter and Poetic Form (New York: Random House, 1965), pp.119-20.

"Imbalance" is what distinguishes sonnet stanza and sonnet doubleness from customary lyric doublings. The poem of two equal parts or two stanzas is usually constructed on an echo principle, sometimes simply, sometimes subtly and ingeniously employed. Sonnet, on the other hand, is not echo- or mirror-verse, partly because of its type of argument and the turn it takes (usually at the beginning of line 9), but also because of the asymmetry that is present in the relationship of its two parts.

In comparison to the four smaller units (three quatrains and a couplet) of the Shakespearean version, the two larger parts of the Petrarchan sonnet seem to constitute a relatively spacious form. Yet it is concise, an impression reinforced by a tight rhyme scheme which nevertheless allows for repetitive and enfolding patterns, encouraging a meditative type of thought, returning and pressing on, looking back and looking forward. The repetition of the abba rhymes in the octave helps to relate the second quatrain to the first, and thus the scheme of rhyme acts as a unifying organizing principle. The variation upon the theme of the first quatrain - or advancement upon it at least - that should be offered in the second, is kept within check, as it were, by the recurring rhyme sounds which demand some thematic relationship or logical unity. There are two patterns of rhyme in the octave : the forward movement of alternating rhymes (ab, ab) and the marking time or on-the-spot movement of the three couplets (bb, aa, bb) enclosed by the "a" rhyme of the first and last lines. In fact, there are three rhyme patterns if we consider that the second quatrain as a whole is a mirror image of the first, thus:



In the sestet there is a change of rhyme scheme : new rhyme sounds sustain the variety, if it can be so expressed, of the sonnet form, changing the patterns at just the right moment, and providing a relief

to the ear that is akin to the release of pressure within the sestet itself, a movement that has been compared to the action of "exhaling".²⁹ Perhaps this sense of release is increased by the greater flexibility in the arrangement of rhymes and by a slight relaxation of tightly interlocking patterns, such as is found in the scheme of two rhyme sounds ccd, ccd or cd, cd, cd; or such as is afforded by the presence in a pattern of three rhyming sounds : cde, cde or cde, edc.

Of the sestet itself, Lever writes:

In the sestet, the act of correlation replaces the completed act of intuition.... The function of the sestet is not to supersede the intuitive knowledge of the octave but to gather up its truth and apprehend it in the region of conscious thought.... [T]he significance of the octave is expounded in the six lines divided in complementary halves, and the integrated quality of the rhyme-scheme, which only progressively impresses itself upon the reader's consciousness, knits up the experience line by line into the poet's total interpretation of life.³⁰

The writings of J.S. Smart and E.A.J. Honigmann have made readers cautious of invoking the term "volta", especially in a prescriptive way. Smart's finding, corroborated by Honigmann, is that no such principle as the volta or turn to signal a change in thought exists in the Italian sonnet; that the term, in fact, means nothing more than "tercet". Smart points out that, while there are innumerable sonnets in Italian literature which have a marked pause in the sense after the quatrains, there are others in which a single train of thought is pursued without any break or turn.³¹ Nevertheless, some pause or turn is present in most sonnets written in English, and I have found it desirable to follow the practice of referring to the volta in my discussions of the form. Even if it is delayed or disguised, it is usually there, forming an essential part of the design and imparting to the sonnet a moment of stasis or of intensity which anticipates the resolution

²⁹Fussell, p.120.

³⁰Lever, pp.6-7.

³¹Smart, pp.30-33; E.A.J. Honigmann, ed., Milton's Sonnets (London: MacMillan, 1966), pp.42-43. See also Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger, Frank J. Warnke and O.B. Hardison, Jr. (New York: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p.894.

in the sestet, or what is the equivalent of the sestet. According to Fussell, the approach to the volta is often the moment of greatest excitement to the reader as the prospect of the resolution of the octave comes into view.³² Wordsworth admired in particular those sonnets of Milton's in which the volta is shifted to beyond the end of line 8 or set in mid-line. In so doing, the sense is continued from the octave into the sestet, and this seemed to Wordsworth to provide the sonnet with a unity which he believed to be partly responsible for its surpassing merit as a poetic form. In a letter to Alexander Dyce, in the spring of 1833, he wrote:

In the better half of his [Milton's] sonnets the sense does not close with the rhyme at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the metre. Now it has struck me, that this is not done merely to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense Unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist.³³

In the Petrarchan form a final couplet is usually avoided. Wordsworth, however, did use it - in 112 of his sonnets - despite the disapproval he expressed of closing the sonnet in this way and in spite of considering it to be "absolutely a vice to have a sharp turning at the end with an epigrammatic point".³⁴ But when he did use it, it was more as a resolution of form than of theme, and his employment of the structure is not necessarily inconsistent with his theory. There is no dramatic reversal of the theme, no epigrammatic twist in his ending; the couplet (unlike that of the usual Shakespearean form) is almost disguised. In an occasional sonnet, for instance, one of the last he wrote, "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway", Wordsworth ends with the lines:

Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
And constant voice, protest against the wrong.³⁵

³²Fussell, pp.120-21.

³³LY 1831-40, p.653.

³⁴Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Dent, 1938), II, 485; hereafter cited as H.C.R. : Books and Their Writers.

³⁵PWO, III, 61-62.

a conclusion which helps to register the strength of his protest, and to give the combined voices of the winds, the torrents and the speaker himself, a sustained ringing sound and a finality reinforced by the rhyme. The couplet ending is not used in this sonnet to drive down the point of the poem : it is a seemingly natural accumulation of rising sound - of combined voices - contained the better in a couplet with its additional harmony of chiming rhyme sounds.

Raymond Dexter Havens considers that, after using the concluding couplet only four times in the first six years of sonnet-writing, Wordsworth "grew more and more lax, until from 1822 to 1846 the couplet-ending became a favorite with him".³⁶ But what has been said above about his employment of the couplet, will, I hope, exonerate him from this charge. It ought to be borne in mind, too, that a poet's theoretical statements are not always sound bases for critical judgments on his work : much has been said (and written) by poets in the way of theory that is a direct contradiction of their practice. So if Wordsworth's objections to the final couplet and his increasing use of it do not match, laxness is not necessarily or even probably the cause. The couplet is not perhaps as seemingly natural and appropriate a conclusion to the Petrarchan form as it is to the Shakespearean sonnet, but it can be successful, and Wordsworth has shown that he can exploit its possibilities, particularly its use as a contribution to argument.

The two larger units of statement of the Italian genre (octave and sestet) would seem to be more suited to Wordsworth's thought mode than the English pattern of four smaller units (three quatrains and a couplet). As we have seen, a first position is provided for in the first eight lines, and [^]second position - a contradiction or resolution - in the last six; and, to use Ker's phrase again, it is "a true argument",³⁷ encouraging a meditative type of thought, and a gravity, both of which are essential components of Wordsworth's poetry. In the "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads", Wordsworth says that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity"³⁸

³⁶Raymond Dexter Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1922), p.532.

³⁷See p.9 above.

³⁸PWO, II, 400.

and that "Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply".³⁹ Our thoughts, he goes on to say, are the embodiments of all our past feelings, and by contemplating the relation of thought and feeling, we discover what it is that is really important to man. Given this equal emphasis on thought and feeling in the case of a Romantic poet such as Wordsworth, whose verse is predominantly lyrical, one could perhaps understand (with the help of some hindsight) that he would ultimately be attracted to a form of meditative lyric like sonnet. One could go further and suggest, with caution, that he might prefer Petrarchan sonnet to Shakespearean, since the octave of the former allows for some expansiveness of thought, or of a stage of thought. There may well be other reasons for his choice of the Petrarchan form : a dislike of smaller units and more distinct separations which could destroy the unity of the poem is possibly one of these. It might be that Milton's mastery of the form inspired Wordsworth to adopt the Italian type rather than the Shakespearean. It could even be purely coincidental that he wrote in this particular brand of the form. Yet it does seem to suit his tone and thought, generally brooding and slow-moving, better than the more rapid flexibility of mind which the Shakespearean sonnet invites. Of course, as Wordsworth wrote no regular Shakespearean type sonnets (except for one very early composition, composed probably in 1787),⁴⁰ all speculation as to how he might have written in this form as a mature poet must remain speculation.

So far in this chapter an attempt has been made to describe the origins of European sonnet and to arrive at some definition of the nature of sonnet, Petrarchan especially, the first form of the poem and the type favoured by Wordsworth. It is now my intention to take up the history of the sonnet in England and to trace it through its major achievements up to Wordsworth's adoption of the genre, referring, as before, to his own sonnet-practice when any relationship between

³⁹ PWO, II, 387-88.

⁴⁰ PWO, I, 269, "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress".

his quatorzains and those of the poet under discussion becomes apparent.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, the sonnet spread to England.⁴¹ Returning from a visit to Italy in 1526-27 and fired with a love of the literature of Italy, Wyatt was the first to introduce the form of the sonnet into England. Most of his sonnets are translations of Petrarch's, or adaptations from the Italian. It was in matter rather than metre, though, that Wyatt imitated Petrarch: twenty-five of the thirty-two sonnets that he wrote are derived directly from the Italian master, and more than half of these are close translations. But, while twenty-nine of his sonnets have the normal Italian abba abba octave, all but one of the sestets break into a quatrain and a couplet and have different rhyme schemes from those of their originals.⁴² Maurice Evans describes the effect of this form as "something radically different from the smooth flow and balance of the Italian original". He continues: "[T]he units of thought in Wyatt's sonnets still tend to be large ones, following the basic grouping of ideas into a balancing octet and sestet, but the final couplet insists on an epigrammatic summing up or final volte face which is not there in Petrarch."⁴³

Evans goes on to say:

Wyatt's tone is colloquial and dramatic rather than formal, and there is within his sonnets a struggle between the dramatic explosiveness of the human voice and the formal structure imposed by the elaborate rhyme-scheme, which is shut in by the final couplet instead of being released through the more flowing Petrarchan structure.⁴⁴

⁴¹The discussion of the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey, pp.16-19 below, is indebted to Lever; Walter L. Bullock, "The Genesis of the English Sonnet Form", *PMLA*, 38 (1923), 729-44; Maurice Evans, English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century, 2nd rev.ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1967). Specific debts will be acknowledged as they occur.

⁴²The exception is "The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar", Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1969), p.3.

⁴³Evans, p.71.

⁴⁴Evans, p.71.

This "struggle", both between the tone of voice and the formality of the rhyme scheme that is imposed upon it, and between the traditional Italian rhythms and English versification, had important results, and these were in the nature of experiments and attempts by Wyatt to overcome an unevenness of metre which a lyricist such as he would regard as highly undesirable. Lever regards this willingness to experiment as the Tudor poet's outstanding characteristic, judging from a formal point of view:

With this realization [that the versification of English weakened the Italian rhythms] the purely formal experiments passed over into problems of language and, necessarily, of content. Once the principles of sonnet versification had been grasped, Wyatt became increasingly concerned with an individual rendering. His verbal changes, at first very tentative...but steadily growing bolder, reacted progressively upon the Italian structure and versification. And at the same time the new devices of the decasyllable and the final couplet...called for departures from the original phrasing, so that subject-matter too was gradually transformed. The two processes...were to set their joint stamp upon the English sonnet.⁴⁵

It was not Wyatt, however, who established the form that has become known as the Shakespearean sonnet but Surrey, building on the foundations laid by Wyatt and adapting the genre to suit his own needs, thus giving to the English sonnet its standard and permanent form. Furthermore, Surrey contributed to an improved iambic pentameter. His experiments in blank verse (beginning with the translations from the Aeneid, published in 1557) were of paramount importance to the development of the blank verse line and the iambic pentameter in any context.⁴⁶ Benefitting from Wyatt's sonnet practice, and developing a smoother iambic pentameter at the same time, he helped to advance the progress of the sonnet in English in a manner which is frequently overlooked.⁴⁷ Today, Surrey is generally regarded as a less exciting sonneteer than his predecessor, for, although his versification is

⁴⁵Lever, pp.19-20.

⁴⁶Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, p.78.

⁴⁷For Surrey's development of the iambic pentameter, see: John Thompson, The Founding of English Metre (London: Routledge, 1961), pp.15-36; Enid Hamer, The Metres of English Poetry (London: Methuen, 1930), pp.61-63, and 189.

without the rugged quality that we find in Wyatt's sonnets, his compositions are less compressed, not as careful in their translation or imitation and, on the whole, laxer. They tend, on occasion, to be paragraphs of description that could well be accommodated by another verse form; for example, the extended catalogue of "The soote season, that bud and blome furth brings".⁴⁸ Surrey's real contribution to the development of the sonnet lies in his arrival at the technical arrangement and rhyme scheme that his successors were to adopt and which Shakespeare was to immortalize : three balanced quatrains and a concluding couplet, rhyming abab, cdcd, efef, gg. The effect of this pattern of three alternately rhymed quatrains is to encourage a logical exposition that continues up to the final couplet which then serves a dramatic purpose, summarizing, reversing or giving point to the subject matter set out in the preceding twelve lines. And once the English sonneteer begins to write sequences, the couplet is often very beautifully used to signal the end of a cycle or group, to return one to the sequence, or to produce either a lingering elegiac note or one of solemn finality. Occasional sonnets make use of the couplet in these last two ways equally well, of course, but it can be particularly effective in a sequence where the utterance contained within the small area of two lines is in one sense the conclusion to the individual sonnet, and in another, a "commentary"⁴⁹ that makes a contribution to the thematic content of the cycle as a whole. In the Shakespearean sonnet, the couplet often is set apart, as it were, by the redirection of thought after line 12, an arrangement which accentuates its importance or dramatizes its effect; and in sequences or groups (of either the Shakespearean or the modified Petrarchan version) the couplet, made conspicuous by the changes of thought and rhyme, can be admirably used to look forward to subsequent sonnets in the work, and at the same time to look back to its own particular sonnet context. It is noteworthy that Wordsworth used the couplet ending more frequently in his later sonnets, when he was given increasingly to writing sequences, than he did in the compositions written before 1820, a fact

⁴⁸Henry Howard Earl of Surrey : *Poems*, ed. Emrys Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p.2.

⁴⁹Fussell, p.128.

which suggests that he perceived the possibilities of the final couplet in a sonnet sequence, and applied them.⁵⁰

Once Surrey had discovered the arrangement which was later to be called the Shakespearean sonnet and had found it to be the form which best suited his needs, he was to use it in all of his later sonnets. These compositions, moving away from the topic of courtly love, helped to prepare the way for Shakespeare's treatment of conventional sonnet themes as well as his introduction of new sonnet matter three decades later. According to Lever, Surrey's themes "called forth a new order of perceptions and modes of expression.... [H]e fashioned the sonnet into a medium for pointed satire, apt eulogy, concise aphorism, and powerful invective."⁵¹

In addition, then, to his workmanship in the form itself - its arrangement, formal possibilities and fluidity of movement - Surrey introduced and left as part of his heritage to English sonneteers a flexibility as to theme and an improved iambic pentameter which were to serve the various needs of future poets. He and Wyatt, the sources in England for the Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms respectively, wrought changes upon the Italian sonnet and so laid a foundation upon which future, and greater, poets could build their own sonnet matter and create of this poem an art form as suited to their mode of expression as the Italian form was to Petrarch and his followers.

George Saintsbury is of the opinion that, coming as it did to an age of clumsy diction and disorderly metre, when poets struggled for an even versification, the sonnet acted on English verse as a corrective influence, encouraging the poet to work to a point of precision of a kind that no other form demanded:

To have something to say; to say it under pretty strict limits of form and very strict ones of space; to say it

⁵⁰ Sonnets by Wordsworth with couplet endings : 21 of the 148 individual sonnets written before 1821 (14%); 96 of the 95 individual sonnets written after 1820 and of the 292 sonnets in sequence written from 1820-1842 (25%). (Here, and subsequently, the statistics offered are based on my own calculations.)

⁵¹ Lever, p.48.

forcibly; to say it beautifully : these are the four great requirements of the poet in general; but they are never set so clearly, so imperatively, so urgently before any variety of poet as before the sonneteer. And there had been no generation of poets before whom they so urgently required setting as before the English poets of the fifteenth and the very earliest sixteenth century.⁵²

The sonnet came into the hands of Wyatt and Surrey at a time when their contributions to its development could be of great and lasting value, affording to both poets a position of prominence in the history of the form which, with Sidney and Shakespeare, was to reach a high point in England.

It was with the publication of Sidney's Astrophil and Stella in 1591, forty-four years after Surrey's death, that the progress of the sonnet in England received its strongest impetus up to that date. This collection of a hundred and eight sonnets (and eleven songs) is a record of his passion for Stella, and it marks the revival of the English sonnet. Sidney gave new life to the form which in the hands of Surrey's successors had evinced no more originality than had the numerous imitations of Petrarch in Italy. Most of these sonnets, as Lever has pointed out, are examples of prevailing technique rather than poems of any literary merit; compositions which in Sidney's own words lacked "poetical sinews".⁵³

Sidney does not adopt Surrey's rhyme scheme but prefers to rhyme his octave on two sounds, usually in a pattern of abba, abba, the sestet most frequently used rhyming cdcdde. There are others - fourteen different rhyme combinations in all⁵⁴ - and almost all of them display a skilful use of rhyme and sound used for special effects, in a way that invites us to join the poet in his obvious enjoyment of conscious artistry. The octave-sestet division is more strongly marked than Surrey's by virtue of the adherence to two rhyme sounds in the octave. In fact, Sidney returns to the Petrarchan form, but employs a couplet ending and does not divide his sestet into two tercets with

⁵²George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody, I (London: MacMillan, 1906), 305.

⁵³Lever, p.51.

⁵⁴Lever, p.89.

such a marked pause as there is in the Italian. His sonnets as a result may lack the harmony and grace of the Italian sonnet, but they are lively and exciting, and they inspired an outburst of sonneteering, possibly providing even Shakespeare with a source of inspiration.

To say that Astrophil and Stella is a record of Astrophil's love for Stella (or Sidney's for Penelope Rich) is grossly to oversimplify the matter of the sequence. It is much more than a record : it is an ingenious combination of fact and fiction, of Sidney the man and poet and Astrophil the young "shepherd-courtier".⁵⁵ A masterly display of disclaiming artistry and ingenuity in the art of employing both, the series is often a witty and as often a serious account of Astrophil's struggle against desire, his scorn for the "daintie wits"⁵⁶ of the Elizabethan court and his contempt for the abuse of Petrarchan conventions; while at the same time it is poetry that acknowledges Petrarchan conceits by using them and that accepts the values of the sophisticated life by endowing Astrophil - and Stella - with courtly qualities. An alternate mockery and acceptance of Petrarchan rhetoric and Astrophil's changing, sometimes ambiguous, attitudes require a sophisticated response from the reader and a critical alertness. A "double perspective"⁵⁷ is maintained throughout, permeating even the two opposing views of love : one noble and ideal, and the other demanding and impatient. David Kalstone observes:

Astrophel cannot resolve the opposing perceptions of the sonnet, though he gives full value both to the claims of ideal beauty and to the energetic promptings of desire. In Sidney's sequence the burden of interest falls upon unreconciled conflict in a way that it does not in the

⁵⁵ Neil L. Rudenstine, Sidney's Poetic Development (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p.182. For information on Sidney's sonnets, I am indebted to Rudenstine; Fuller; Lever; David Kalstone, Sidney's Poetry : Contexts and Interpretations (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967); J.G. Nichols, The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney. An Interpretation in the Context of his Life and Times (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1974). Particular debts will be acknowledged as they occur.

⁵⁶ The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, p.166, sonnet no. 3.

⁵⁷ Rudenstine, p.181.

more harmonious sonnets of Petrarch.... He chooses...to dramatize the demands of appetite on the world of the ideal.⁵⁸

Sonnets 5 and 71, given below, provide two of the best examples of the conflicting claims of virtuous love and desire:

It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve
 The inward light: and that the heavenly part
 Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,
 Rebels to Nature, strive for their owne smart. 4
 It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart,
 An image is, which for our selves we carve;
 And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart,
 Till that good God make Church and Churchman starve. 8
 True, that true Beautie Vertue is indeed,
 Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,
 Which elements with mortall mixture breed:
 True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made, 12
 And should in soule up to our countrey move:
 True, and yet true that I must Stella love.⁵⁹

Who will in fairest booke of Nature know,
 How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be,
 Let him but learne of Love to reade in thee,
Stella, those faire lines, which true goodnesse show. 4
 There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
 Not by rude force, but sweetest soveraigntie
 Of reason, from whose light those night-birds flie;
 That inward sunne in thine eyes shineth so. 8
 And not content to be Perfection's heire
 Thy selfe, doest strive all minds that way to move,
 Who marke in thee what is in thee most faire.
 So while thy beautie drawes the heart to love, 12
 As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good:
 'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food.'⁶⁰

In both of the above sonnets thirteen lines acknowledge the realm of Platonic ideas and employ Petrarchan conceits to express the poet's acceptance of it. In fact, the second sonnet quoted is one of Sidney's most Petrarchan in both style and matter. Yet the argument of each is dramatically reversed in the fourteenth line where Astrophil's rebellion against Virtue denies the resolution that would seem to be the natural conclusion to the sonnet. The potential harmony of the sonnet is

⁵⁸ Kalstone, p.122.

⁵⁹ The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, p.167, sonnet no.5.

⁶⁰ The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, p.201, sonnet no.71.

disrupted and we are left instead with an impression, not of Astrophil's submission to the worship of virtuous love set out in thirteen lines, but of the strength of his passion proclaimed in one. It is the final line rather than the couplet that repeatedly expresses the poet's frustration and rebellion and that reverses or collapses the argument built up in the preceding lines or acts as a sting in the tail.⁶¹ Accordingly, the fourteenth line of the sonnet is frequently deliberately anti-climactic in nature or colloquial in language.

Sonnet 5 does, of course, prepare us for the troubled conclusion in, for example, its insistence upon the word "true", by the use of such verb forms as "ought to be" (line 3) and "should move" (13), as well as by the warning that all is not well in statements like "It is most true" and "And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart". The implications of all these items become more obvious after we have read the last line. Yet the ending is a surprise and, in sonnet 71, a distinct shock, the force of which shatters the impression created before it of control and restraint and gives dramatic voice to the tension of unresolved conflict. Such utterances are characteristic of many of Sidney's sonnets, providing the excitement and disturbance that we come to expect of the sequence and imparting to the poems an energy that is one of its most attractive qualities.

Astrophil and Stella is punctuated with such forceful and colloquial ejaculations, utterances that provide it with moments of drama which the reader increasingly anticipates and enjoys. Indeed, the entire sequence is a drama, a "Theatre of Pleasure" as Nashe called it in his 1591 preface,⁶² with its many conversations and lively scenes, and with Astrophil as its prime mover, acting out his shifting roles and changing moods. Contributing to the dramatic impact is the alternation of Sidney's public and private voice, his ceremonious and formal verse changing suddenly to an intimate tone or, as the above sonnets illustrate, to forthright familiar speech. According to Neil Rudenstine, Astrophil's real mode is "not so much that of ceremony as of intimate,

⁶¹For some examples see The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, sonnets 5, 11, 14, 47, 52, 71, on pp.167, 170, 171-72, 188, 190, 201 respectively.

⁶²Thomas Nashe, Pref., Syr Philip Sidney : His "Astrophel and Stella"...for Thomas Newman (1591), as quoted in Nichols, p.80.

conversational speech, particularly of entreaty". Rudenstine continues: "He needs a style of direct address, just as he needs full response from Stella simply because that is the stuff whereof his love is made."⁶³ But, while the prevalent manner of his sequence is conversational, it is nevertheless that of an Elizabethan courtier, sharpened by wit, polished, and evidencing formality and Petrarchan ceremoniousness when it pleases him.

'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'⁶⁴

This is what Sidney does; nevertheless, he takes a rather sly delight in his own skilful use of rhetoric and ornament, protesting not at convention and artifice, but at the abuse of it; at mere imitation in "studying inventions fine" and "turning others' leaves" (I, p.165). Sidney's poetry, even when he is at his most conventional, bears the unmistakable mark of his own genius, and his own sensibility.

Sidney's main contribution to the development of the sonnet form lies in his handling of the sestet. He returned to the Italian octave, rejecting Surrey's introduction of two new rhyme sounds in the second quatrain, but retaining the couplet in the sestet, and using it, and the last line in particular, not as witty summary as did Surrey, but as a contrast to what has been built up before that moment in the poem.

Between the years 1592-1596, following the publication of Astrophil and Stella, more sonnets were written than had been since Wyatt introduced the form into England.⁶⁵ Among the sequences published in the 1590's were Spenser's Amoretti (a cycle of eighty-nine sonnets celebrating the poet's courtship), Daniel's Delia, Drayton's Ideas Mirrour, and minor sequences by poets such as Barnes, Fletcher, Lodge and Constable. The Italian form, however, ceases to occupy a position of prominence in the history of the sonnet after Sidney. The Shakespearean sonnet usurps its place until the seventeenth century, when Donne and Milton give new life to the Petrarchan form.

⁶³Rudenstine, p.220.

⁶⁴The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, p.165, sonnet no. I, l.14.

⁶⁵Lever, p.92.

All sonneteers can be connected to a central sonnet tradition and Shakespeare is no exception. J.B. Leishman, in particular, has demonstrated Shakespeare's indebtedness to his European and English predecessors.⁶⁶ Shakespeare seldom rebels against the past but, once he has written his Sonnets, the path of the genre broadens into a main road. Existing conventions, themes and sonnet-tones are redirected, increasing sonnet possibilities, and opening the way for Donne, Herbert and their successors to express in the sonnet their particular sensibilities and subject matter. The fact that now there is practically no topic that the sonnet may not treat of, is largely the work of Shakespeare. The genre begins with the comparatively narrow convention of courtly love and ends with virtually the whole range of life. As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, "from extreme particularity there is a road to the highest universality".⁶⁷ In replacing the Mistress by the Patron-Friend, Shakespeare frees the sonnet from the convention of courtship and turns it into an exploration of the nature of the whole of love. He starts with a specific kind of love and ends by talking of any love: "Shakespeare...ends by expressing simply love, the quintessence of all loves whether erotic, parental, filial, amicable or feudal.... The love is, in the end, so simply and entirely love that our cadres are thrown away and we cease to ask what kind."⁶⁸ However, Edward Hubler, in defining the generous kind of love that Shakespeare celebrates, has succeeded in naming it, most aptly, the love of "the open heart", as opposed to that of "the closed heart".⁶⁹

Of Shakespeare's one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, first published in 1609, roughly two-thirds are addressed to the Young Man, twenty-five to the Dark Lady, and two, which are not part of either series, conclude the sequence. In both series we find subject matter that is entirely new to the form; for example, the negative aspects of

⁶⁶ J.B. Leishman, Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets, Hutchinson University Library, 2nd ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1963).

⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p.505.

⁶⁸ Lewis, p.505.

⁶⁹ Edward Hubler, The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), pp.95-109.

erotic experience, as Lever has shown,⁷⁰ and in the secondary series of poems, the Dark Lady herself. We also find themes and conceits that have become an intrinsic part of the form since its inception. But, when traditional sonnet matter is in the hands of Shakespeare, it becomes revitalized, and the conventional is transmuted into the unique. Shakespeare re-models the themes and develops the conceits that he takes over, producing a sonnet that reflects an intensely individual experience yet is one of a line that continues to carry the density of tradition. Furthermore, he endows the poem with a hitherto unknown flexibility from which future poets can benefit. We expect the sonnet to take different directions with and after Shakespeare, and it does precisely this, giving profound poignancy to the poet's own disclaimer of such invention:

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
 So far from variation or quick change?
 Why with the time do I not glance aside
 To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?
 Why write I still all one, ever the same,
 And keep invention in a noted weed,
 That every word doth almost tell my name,
 Showing their birth, and where they did proceed? ⁷¹

The depth of exploration and the synoptic nature of Shakespeare's themes is accompanied by a considerable number of organizing principles and sonnet patterns. An inner tension is produced, by the inter-action of these formal patterns and the thematic content of the sonnet, that is to a large degree responsible for much of the energy and excitement generated in the poem.⁷² Imagery is one of the chief integrating elements of the argument, not only for the individual sonnet, but for the sequence as a whole, working in such a way that the progressive parts of the sonnet reflect, and gather up, earlier sections, establishing links between the separate sonnets and unifying the whole cycle. But syntax, imagery and thought are all inter-dependent : Shakespeare thinks his thought out largely in terms of images. He argues a

⁷⁰Lever, pp.163 and 167.

⁷¹Shakespeare's Sonnets, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977), p.67, sonnet no.76, ll.1-8.

⁷²See Stephen Booth, An Essay on Shakespeare's "Sonnets" (1969; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971), pp.35-60.

decaying grandeur that precede it. The poet's meditations on the destruction these things suffer at the hand of Time lead him to make the pronouncement in line 12 which constitutes a climax in the poem. But the couplet can in no way be regarded as a mere addendum to the douzain. Its elegiac note lingers on, and the reader is left with an overwhelming sense of sadness. Wordsworth felt it and remembered it. In his reflections on the achievements of man in The Prelude, he invokes Shakespeare's words to give greater depth to the expression of his own grief over mutability:

Thou also, man! hast wrought,
 For commerce of thy nature with herself,
 Things that aspire to unconquerable life;
 And yet we feel - we cannot choose but feel -
 That they must perish. Tremblings of the heart
 It gives, to think that our immortal being
 No more shall need such garments; and yet man,
 As long as he shall be the child of the earth,
 Might almost 'weep to have' what he may lose,
 Nor be himself extinguished, but survive,
 Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate. 75

When the more skilful of Shakespeare's sonnets, like no.64, presents its singleness of theme through variations upon one image or a series of related images, the conclusion to the poem (i.e., the couplet) is an inevitable, articulated result or climax to the sonnet, even when the last two lines are apparently not a continuation of those images. In sonnet no.73, the couplet, itself not metaphoric, brings to light additional subtleties of the images that precede it:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. 4
 In me thou seest the twilight of such day,
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest. 8
 In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consumed with that which it was nourished by. 12
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long. 76

⁷⁵ Prelude (Maxwell), p.169, V, ll.18-28.

⁷⁶ Shakespeare's Sonnets, p.64, sonnet no.73.

In this sonnet, whose imagery has received more critical attention than most, the three inter-related quatrain images of fading life (autumn, twilight and the embers of a fire) all of which are followed by a state akin to death, are assembled in sequence to arouse an anticipation of the idea of death. This idea of death is crystallized in the couplet. But the couplet also formally introduces the idea of love. The emphasis on love, at a moment in the poem when the reader is awaiting a statement about death, has the powerful effect of halting the seemingly inevitable progression of the sonnet thought. It returns the reader to a time before the speaker had begun to age as well as invoking the present time, and so achieves a thematic doubling back which could be regarded as an equivalent of the satisfying "doubleness"⁷⁷ of argument found in most Petrarchan sonnet form. The idea of love announced in the couplet invites us to review the foregoing three image sets and draw what is subdued or latent in them to the surface. A doubling of imagery is then perceived, more subtle than any explicit time-contrast of "before" and "after", as the love illuminates what is beautiful in the process of decline, and adds poignancy to the ageing of the speaker. This, too, amounts to a doubleness of statement.

Not all of Shakespeare's sonnets work like nos.64 and 73 (where the quatrain groups a set of images and each set is linked to the next). Occasionally we have a sonnet employing one dominant image (like the legal metaphor underlying the argument of sonnet 30). And occasionally we have what Winifred Nowottny calls, "a litany of images" running right through the sonnet, such as is to be found in sonnets 1 and 66.⁷⁸ In poems like these, the connections between the images may be obvious or submerged, and in the case of no.1, the catalogue of images serves the larger ordering of the sequence as a whole. As Mrs Nowottny has shown in her discussion of sonnets 1 - 6, the sonnet cycle makes extended use of each image in each of the first twelve lines of this sonnet.⁷⁹ Woven through the two series are strands of dominant connecting images

⁷⁷Ker, p.173. See also p.9 above.

⁷⁸Winifred M.T. Nowottny, "Formal Elements in Shakespeare's Sonnets : Sonnets I-VI", Essays in Criticism, II (Jan. 1952), p.77.

⁷⁹Winifred Nowottny, p.77.

such as beauty's rose and its accompanying thorns, base weeds and canker, the four seasons, the looking glass and dial, and, of course, Time in its many guises. These may fade after an appearance, or go underground as it were, but come to the surface again offering greater penetration of their role and intricacy on each occasion.

We do not find as clear a doubleness in the Shakespearean form as we do in the Petrarchan. But there is often present in the English sonnet a sense of the octave-sestet underlying the movement of the poem, until the eighteenth century at least.⁸⁰ In An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets, Stephen Booth points out that in nearly two-thirds of the Sonnets there is a muted octave.⁸¹ This may be due to the natural progression of the quatrains in certain sonnets, and not to the influence of the Petrarchan form : the third quatrain is of necessity denser than the two preceding it, if, as is usually the case, each is a development of, or complication upon, the former quatrain. Sometimes the pause is merely felt, when, for example, it is the result of an intensifying of mood or change of tone. But, frequently, it is more obviously there because of various kinds of internal divisions : logical, syntactical and metrical variations comprising the chief of these. In Wyatt and Surrey there is the break between the octave and sestet with the change in rhyme scheme, whereas in the Shakespearean form the most pronounced change occurs after the twelfth line. But Shakespeare achieves a pause by other means in those of his sonnets which do have discernible octaves. According to Booth, "[t]he number of Shakespeare's devices and combinations of devices to effect his muted octaves is almost as great as the number of sonnets in which a suggestion of an octave appears."⁸² In the sonnet quoted above, "When I have seen by time's fell hand defaced", an octave-sestet division is implied in the reference in line 8 to "loss" and "store" which prepare us for the beginning of resolution by reason of their quality of recapitulation; and in the generalizing phrase of line 9 "such an interchange of state" after the particulars of lines 1 - 7.

⁸⁰ See Havens, pp.486-88.

⁸¹ Booth, An Essay on Shakespeare's "Sonnets", p.36.

⁸² Booth, p.37.

The rest of the final quatrain sustains the style of generalized terms, and confirms our sense of its being a later stage of the thought.

A few of the ways in which a muted octave is accomplished are the subduing of a break by means of enjambment between the first two quatrains; a single sentence running the length of the first eight lines; a tense change in the third quatrain; a metrical variation in the first foot of line 9.⁸³ These internal divisions contribute to the sense of sonnet doubleness and reinforce the argument itself by directing the energy of the final six lines backwards (or inwards) to meet that of the first eight which moves towards it. The result of this pause at the end of line 8 is to remove the danger of a couplet that is too light (in terms of the argument), too epigrammatic or ill-balanced in relation to the rest of the poem.

Wordsworth's attitude to Shakespeare's sonnets is in some degree difficult to define. In the "Essay, Supplementary to Lyrical Ballads (1815)" he wrote:

There is extant a small Volume of miscellaneous poems, in which Shakespeare expresses his own feelings in his own person. It is not difficult to conceive that the Editor, George Steevens, should have been insensible to the beauties of one portion of that Volume, the Sonnets; though in no part of the writings of this Poet is found, in an equal compass, a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed.⁸⁴

Of the couplet, he much later had the following to say: "Shakespeare's sonnets...are not upon the Italian model, which Milton's are; they are merely quatrains with a couplet tacked to the end; and if they depended much upon the versification they would unavoidably be heavy."⁸⁵ But he pays tribute to the earlier poet in two of his sonnets, "Scorn not the Sonnet",⁸⁶ and "It is not to be thought of that the Flood",⁸⁷

⁸³For the discussion of these octave-sestet divisions, and others, see Booth, pp.37-51.

⁸⁴PWO, II, p.416.

⁸⁵LY, 1831-40, p.587.

⁸⁶PWO, III, 20-21.

⁸⁷PWO, III, 117.

the first of which contains the familiar

with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart;

Wordsworth describes the sonnets' chief faults as "heavy ones ... sameness, tediousness, quaintness and elaborate obscurity", acknowledging at the same time that there are many "very fine lines and passages". He expressed a violent dislike for the Dark Lady sonnets, terming them "abominably harsh, obscure and worthless". Coleridge's reaction to these critical pronouncements (with which he disagreed) was that they were "the rude mark of his [Wordsworth's] hand left by the sweat of haste in a St. Veronica handkerchief".⁸⁸ It might be (the marginal note in which they appear is undated) that they belong to the period during which, as Wordsworth himself professed, he disliked the sonnet generally; or that he found Shakespeare's material, or his handling of it, distasteful.

Both Shakespeare and Wordsworth injected new life into the sonnet by rescuing it from the threat of triviality and by freeing it from some of the usages impeding it, while also re-establishing it as a personal and universal utterance. Shakespeare extended the possibilities of the sonnet in ways that Wordsworth ultimately benefitted from: the latter poet brought to the form an expansiveness of theme and a ranging energy that helped to deliver the genre from narrow conventions in a way which reminds us of Shakespeare's sonnet activity two hundred and fifty years earlier. The concern with process, with showing the mind and heart at work so that the reader is led to feel and think with the poet as his thoughts are formulated, is perhaps responsible, in some measure, for the fluidity that their sonnets have in common. We are sometimes reminded of the soliloquies in the plays when reading Shakespeare's sonnets: the speaker reveals his private thoughts and feelings to an audience which watches his mind at work. Only, in the sonnets, the subject matter is usually less specific. In this respect, namely,

⁸⁸Wordsworth's and Coleridge's quoted words are cited from Marginalia in the set of Robert Anderson's Poets of Great Britain (13 vols., 1793-1807) in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C. See Peter Jones, ed., Shakespeare: The Sonnets. A Casebook (London: MacMillan, 1977), p.41.

a concern with process, manifesting itself in a turning over of images, Shakespeare could be thought to anticipate Romantic interests.⁸⁹

The next great writer of sonnet was Milton. His sonnets, written in the mid-seventeenth century, accomplished a further revolution in sonnet material. They provided perhaps the most marked shift in emphasis in the history of the genre, giving yet another great impetus to its existence. The vitality which had for the most part faded from the Italian type was returned to it in Milton's quatorzains, eighteen of which are in English, using the Petrarchan form. Sonnets II-VI, written in Italian, and the first sonnet, "O nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray", are early compositions, all love poems which appear to have had a negligible influence on other poets. But the later poems, composed over a period of thirteen years (1642-1655) considerably affected the development of the form, and were the immediate source of Wordsworth's sonnet-inspiration.

Political and personal events are the concerns of these sonnets which are strictly occasional poems. Of the sonnets written in English, Havens writes:

They impress us not with their author's cleverness but with his sincerity; they do not savor of art for art's sake, of something written to while away an idle hour, to fill out a sequence, or to follow a fad. Each, we feel, was called forth by some actual event or strong emotion without which it would not have been written.⁹⁰

Insisting on particularities of time, place and person, the sonnets record actual events and moments in the poet's life. Sonnets of this nature were not unknown before Milton : there are numerous precedents in Italy, and the Elizabethans had introduced these types into England. But, with the English poets, this kind of sonnet was used as an example of the general or as a meditation on a theme rather than as the record of an actual event in which the presence of the poet is undisguised. Milton's presence is felt in each of his poems, and from each of them

⁸⁹ See Barbara Hernstein Smith, Poetic Closure : A Study of How Poems End (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1968), pp.142-44.

⁹⁰ Havens, p.483.

we learn about the poet's own life. Yet a universality is achieved : far-reaching themes such as freedom and restraint, friendship, and the celebration of goodness are at the centre of these poems, imparting to them public as well as private and particularized aspects. It is this "ennobling of its theme" that Havens considers to be Milton's greatest service to the sonnet.⁹¹ The artistry and the precision of his composition accompany its universal significance of theme. Lee M. Johnson expresses this as follows: "Milton's fidelity to each occasion in each sonnet is the basis of his development of an aesthetically perfected, autonomous entity, a poem complete in itself in the highest sense."⁹²

The Petrarchan conceit and other traditional sonnet types of image are absent from Milton's sonnets. His language on the whole is that of plain statement, austere and direct, a style that would naturally appeal to Wordsworth. In two separate letters he indicated his approval: "Milton's Sonnets...I think manly and dignified compositions, distinguished by simplicity and unity of object and aim, and undisfigured by false or vicious ornaments";⁹³ and, looking back to the eve of his inspiration, "I was singularly struck with the style of harmony, and the gravity, and republican austerity of those compositions."⁹⁴

The direct style and the "simplicity...of object and aim" which appealed to Wordsworth are as much the mark of his own sonnets as they are of Milton's. So, too, is the strenuous energy of utterance and density of thought that is to be found in Milton's compositions. These poetic tendencies characterize Wordsworth's poetry in general, of course, as they do The Prelude - to single out the poet's greatest poem - but it would probably be correct to say that they were encouraged in his sonnet writing by his predecessor's quatorzains. The latter would be

⁹¹Havens, p.483.

⁹²Lee M. Johnson, Wordsworth and the Sonnet, *Anglistica*, Vol.19 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1973), p.21.

⁹³The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805), ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.312; hereafter cited as EL.

⁹⁴LY, 1821-30, p.71.

examples to Wordsworth of poems that have a "worthy purpose" and "important subjects",⁹⁵ and it is more than likely that he would have had these poems in mind when he wrote his early sonnets. The dominant theme in a number of Milton's sonnets is liberty; likewise it is the subject of Wordsworth's Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, and the main theme in its various manifestations of his sonnets as a whole. According to Johnson, Milton's influence extends as far as Wordsworth's adoption of the same rhetorical pattern in his first sonnets on liberty; and, in his chapter on "The Public and Private Centers of the Sonnets to Liberty", he points out that "Wordsworth's most practical insight into his predecessor's efforts, which is primarily responsible for giving him the technical confidence to project a public voice in the form, is that a three-part structure best lends itself to the rhetorically unified presentation of topical subjects."⁹⁶ Johnson shows how Wordsworth used the three-part rhetorical pattern (which may be compared to "the narratio, propositio, and peroratio from judicial oratory")⁹⁷ as a basis for the Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, a pattern which predominates in those of Milton's sonnets which Wordsworth professed to like the most, namely "To Mr Cyriack Skinner Upon his Blindness", "On his Blindness", "Captain or colonel, or knight in arms", "On the late Massacre in Piedmont", "To the Lord General Cromwell" and "On the Lord General Fairfax at the siege of Colchester".⁹⁸ It is Milton's habit to plunge directly into his theme in the first lines, many of which begin with an apostrophe (four of the six above-mentioned sonnets start in this way), and in these matters, too, Wordsworth's sonnets resemble those of his predecessor, as "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour" well illustrates.⁹⁹

In a number of his sonnets Milton departs from the regular Petrarchan form. The irregularities in these sonnets are not of his

⁹⁵ PWO, II, "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads", 387 and 388.

⁹⁶ Johnson, p.42.

⁹⁷ Johnson, p.42.

⁹⁸ EL, p.312.

⁹⁹ PWO, III, 116. See also Miscellaneous Sonnets Part I, nos. IV, XXXVI; Part II, nos. XVIII, XXXI; Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty Part II, nos. III, XIX.

own invention, but had been anticipated by Italian sonneteers and by certain Elizabethans. Milton was familiar with the Italians and, according to Smart, was most directly influenced by Giovanni della Casa, a sixteenth century poet whose sonnets Milton knew intimately.¹⁰⁰ The aim of della Casa's poems, in Smart's words, "...is to produce new effects by some sudden and striking departure from the familiar flow of language and verse. His sentences ignore the bounds of metre, passing imperceptibly from line to line, and ending abruptly where an ear attuned to Petrarch's modulation might least have expected...."¹⁰¹ The practice of running the thought and syntax across from the octave into the sestet without a pause and the free use of enjambment in Della Casa's sonnets attracted Milton and he took these tendencies further to create his own version of sonnet. The internal divisions of quatrains and tercets and of octave and sestet no longer correspond with breaks or pauses in thought as they do in the classical Petrarchan form. The sonnet divisions remain, of course, in the quatrain rhyme patterns, brought out further by the assertiveness of Milton's rhymes, and in the sense of a turn somewhere in the poem. Milton delays or even advances the turn (as in sonnets I and XV) or makes it difficult to locate; he is fond of placing it in the ninth line or even later. It was these structural changes which appealed to Wordsworth and which helped give rise to his illustration of the sonnet as a "syllogism" or three-part poem:

It should seem that the Sonnet, like every other legitimate composition, ought to have a beginning, a middle, and an end - in other words, to consist of three parts, like the three propositions of a syllogism, if such an illustration may be used. But the frame of metre adopted by the Italians does not accord with this view, and, as adhered to by them, it seems to be, if not arbitrary, best fitted to a division of the sense into two parts, of eight and six lines each. Milton, however, has not submitted to this. In the better half of his sonnets the sense does not close with the rhyme at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the metre. Now it has struck me, that this is not done merely to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense Unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Smart, p.26.

¹⁰¹ Smart, p.26.

¹⁰² LY 1831-40, pp.652-53.

It would appear from these reflections that Wordsworth believed that a two-part and a three-part structure could co-exist in the sonnet. If the classical division of the octave and the sestet were disguised, or were less easy to locate, the three-part pattern of a beginning, a middle, and an end could be accommodated more readily, thus contributing to an effect of wholeness that is not fragmented by distinct and anticipated separations. The Petrarchan form as used by Milton offered Wordsworth the particular blend of freedom and restraint that accorded most with his idea of unity in the sonnet, a unity that he expressed metaphorically as "the image of an orbicular body, - a sphere - or a dew-drop".¹⁰³ The absence of the couplet ending which for Wordsworth constituted, too often, a sharp "epigrammatic point",¹⁰⁴ would intensify this impression; and it is noteworthy that Milton ended only one of his sonnets ("To the Lord General Cromwell") with a couplet.

In the sonnet "To Mr. Cyriack Skinner Upon his Blindness" (Smart believes that this heading to the sonnet in Phillips's life of Milton was not Milton's own),¹⁰⁵ the structural ordering of the poem that Wordsworth approved of can be seen at work, and with foresight we may have some intimation of how Wordsworth will use the Miltonic developments.

Cyriack, this three years' day these eyes, though clear
 To outward view, of blemish or of spot;
 Bereft of light their seeing have forgot,
 Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear 4
 Of sun or moon or star throughout the year,
 Or man or woman. Yet I argue not
 Against heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
 Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer 8
 Right onward. What supports me dost thou ask?
 The conscience, friend, to have lost them overlid
 In liberty's defence, my noble task,
 Of which all Europe talks from side to side. 12
 This thought might lead me through the world's vain
 mask
 Content though blind, had I no better guide. 106

¹⁰³ LY 1831-40, p.653.

¹⁰⁴ See above, p.13.

¹⁰⁵ Smart, p.106.

¹⁰⁶ The Poems of John Milton, ed. Carey and Fowler, p.414.

There is no break in syntax or in sense at the end of the first quatrain, nor is there a pause at the end of the eighth line. Yet an insistence on rhyme sounds works against the enjambment and irregularly placed pauses to create a strong sonnet impression of the more usual imbalance, despite the structural departures from it. The subject-matter is, however, separated into three parts rather than two : in the first, the poet's state of three-year blindness is described. This is followed by the middle section in which he declares that he does not rebel against or sink under his infliction. The third section advances the reason for his acceptance of the loss of sight. It is features such as these in Milton's sonnet that Wordsworth considered to be aids "in giving that pervading sense of intense Unity in which the excellence of the sonnet has always seemed...mainly to consist".

Milton's position among the great writers of the sonnet is due not only to the changes he made in subject-matter and structure, but also to his fine craftsmanship and energetic utterance of noble theme. The "republican austerity" of his compositions is offset by a dexterity of performance that prompted Wordsworth to write:

I think the music [of a Miltonic sonnet] exceedingly well suited to its end, that is, it has an energetic and varied flow of sound crowding into narrow room more of the combined effect of rhyme and blank verse than can be done by any other kind of verse I know of.¹⁰⁷

In three poems, "It is not to be thought of that the Flood", "Latitudinarianism" (Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Part III, IV) and "Sonnet on Milton", Wordsworth composed a tribute in sonnet-form to his predecessor; and in "Scorn not the Sonnet", Milton's superiority in the field of sonneteers is established in the image of the sonnet as a trumpet in his hands:

whence he blew
Soul-animating strains - alas, too few! 108

During the first part of the eighteenth century the sonnet, and the Shakespearean sonnet in particular, sank into disuse once again.

¹⁰⁷ EL, p.312.

¹⁰⁸ PWO, III, 20-21.

Milton, though the most important single influence once sonnet writing was resumed, did not begin any immediate sonnet revolution : when the sonnet did begin to reappear and the form to become popular, his was the most direct influence upon it until the last decade of the century at least, with the result that the Petrarchan model (and variations upon it) was the form favoured for almost the entire century.¹⁰⁹

Johnson attributes the neglect of the form during this period to the Augustan preference for literature that is classical in origin.¹¹⁰ Havens, referring extensively to critical publications and letters of the time, maintains that a general ignorance and dislike of the sonnets of the Italians and Elizabethans prevailed among eighteenth century readers, and that, even when the sonnet began to flourish after 1740, a distrust of the form remained.¹¹¹ It is likely that the poets who were writing sonnets at this time were diffident about their compositions and influenced by the fashionable mood, as many sonnets remained unpublished for years after they had been written. This state of affairs can partly be accounted for by the condemnation of the form by the conservatives in literature at the time, Samuel Johnson being the most notable of these.¹¹² Wordsworth himself, it has been noted earlier (on page 1 of this thesis), held a similar view initially, and in 1827 he addressed "Scorn not the Sonnet" to those who frowned upon the form.

In 1740 interest in the sonnet was revived, and a measure of its popularity during the following decades is that nearly every poet or would-be poet wrote at least one sonnet, while a number of writers were prolific sonneteers. By the end of the century it had become the most popular type of verse published in magazine or book.¹¹³ We have it on Havens's authority that, whereas only thirteen writers were known to have used the sonnet form between 1660-1740, the number writing in the

¹⁰⁹Havens, p.523.

¹¹⁰Johnson, p.16.

¹¹¹Havens, pp.480-92.

¹¹²Havens, pp.521 and 526.

¹¹³Havens, p.499.

last two decades of the eighteenth century proves false the generally held theory that it was an era altogether barren of sonnet:

As some fifteen hundred or two thousand appeared in books during the same decades [1780-1800], the oft-repeated remark as to the scarcity of sonnets in the latter half of the eighteenth century must be another of those imaginative touches with which scholarship has adorned this arid age.¹¹⁴

By now the sonnet had become almost exclusively concerned with Nature. The publication of the first of Thomas Edwards's sonnets in 1748 was to give the strongest impetus to the sonnet ferment which followed, but it is Thomas Warton's which are of greater significance to this history, as they "were the first to turn for their subjects from persons to nature and to places of legendary or historic interest".¹¹⁵ Two of Warton's nine sonnets are addressed to Thomas Gray, "To Mr Gray" (no.VI) and "To the Same" (no.VII), five have specific places as their topics or are addressed to specific places, and the remaining two are entitled "On Bathing" and "Written on a Blank Leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon".¹¹⁶ Among the minor writers of the form who followed Warton were Thomas Russell and Charlotte Smith, whose compositions were admired by Wordsworth¹¹⁷ and who possibly contributed to the influence which the eighteenth century descriptive sonnet had upon him. But it was the sonnets of William Lisle Bowles, published in the two volumes of his poetical works, which, of all the poems of this period, exercised the greatest influence upon sonneteering, and which, according to Havens, provided inspiration for the lake poets and their contemporaries.¹¹⁸ Enthusiastic praise was certainly accorded Bowles by Coleridge, and we know that Wordsworth thought highly of his sonnets, calling them (in a letter to Edward Moxon, May 1833) "very successful".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴Havens, pp.488 and 499.

¹¹⁵Havens, p.497.

¹¹⁶The Three Wartons : A Choice of their Verse, ed. Eric Partridge (London: Scholartis Press, 1927), pp.121-29.

¹¹⁷See LY 1831-40, p.652; PWO, IV, 403; H.C.R. : Books and Their Writers, I, 293.

¹¹⁸Havens, p.515.

¹¹⁹LY 1831-40, p.656.

Bowles's sonnets reflected the mood of the times, the leading elements of which were pensiveness, gentle feeling and melancholy. Their tones were soothing; in Coleridge's words, the poems offered

soft strains
Whose sadness soothes me, like the murmuring
Of wild-bees in the sunny showers of spring! 120

Bowles's sonnet, "At Tynemouth Priory", which heads the group of sonnets in Volume I, illustrates the qualities celebrated in Coleridge's sonnet tribute, part of which was quoted above:

As slow I climb the cliff's ascending side,
 Much musing on the track of terror past,
 When o'er the dark wave rode the howling blast,
 Pleased I look back, and view the tranquil tide 4
 That laves the pebbled shore : and now the beam
 Of evening smiles on the gray battlement,
 And yon forsaken tower that time has rent:-
 The lifted oar far off with transient gleam 8
 Is touched, and hushed is all the billowy deep!
 Soothed by the scene, thus on tired Nature's breast
 A stillness slowly steals, and kindred rest;
 While sea-sounds lull her, as she sinks to sleep, 12
 Like melodies that mourn upon the lyre,
 Waked by the breeze, and, as they mourn, expire! 121

More a poet of the beautiful than the sublime - "more a Warton than a Milton"¹²² (as a schoolboy he was under Warton's tuition) - Bowles gives evidence of the Miltonic influence in some of his sonnets. A number begin with an apostrophe in the Miltonic fashion and there is an occasional attempt to recall Milton in phrase or tone. Two of his sonnets, "In Youth" and "In Age", are tributes to Milton.¹²³ In these, he is acknowledged as "our noblest poet", and they are closer to the Miltonic form than are most of Bowles's compositions. His favoured rhyme scheme is abba cddc effe gg. There are several variations on the sestet, but the octave is invariably abba cddc, and he displays a fondness for the ^{final} couplet throughout.

¹²⁰ The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), p.85.

¹²¹ The Poetical Works of William Lisle Bowles, ed. Rev. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1855), I, 7.

¹²² Bowles, II, xvii.

¹²³ Bowles, I, 30-31.

In his sonnets written as memorials to places or inspired by his tours of regions, Wordsworth recalls Bowles and the eighteenth century sonneteers for whom the sonnet became the favourite occasional poem referring to actual events, people, and places. The descriptive sonnet had come to the fore, and with it appeared a feature of Romanticism : the movement towards the specific and spontaneous and away from the more general and retrospective expression of the feelings of the poet. These sonnets, some of them fine compositions, once again change the emphasis of the form, and make their contribution, however slight, to the development of the genre.

Wordsworth started to write the sonnet at a time when the genre was popular but when the poems produced were not distinguished. He restored the form to a position of excellence that it had not occupied since Milton, and, if we think of the period before Milton, since Sidney and Shakespeare. Miltonic influence had been weakened by the sentimentality which had crept into the sonnet round about the turn of the century, and by the popularity of the descriptive sonnet; it was Wordsworth who gave the Miltonic type new life and who prolonged its influence. But, though he was chiefly inspired by the Miltonic sonnet, it was not the resurrection of this type alone that constituted Wordsworth's contribution to the form : he helped to free it from various usages that preceded him such as excessive melancholy, sentimentality and triviality, re-establishing it as a poem of real literary merit. And he appears to have been attracted by the genre itself, quite independently of Milton's use of it. If this concern with traditional form seems perhaps a little surprising in a Romantic poet, one must remember that Wordsworth was always sympathetic towards certain tendencies in eighteenth century thought, as indeed were most Romantic poets. It was this interest in the genre, together with his experimentation in the form, that helped to advance the sonnet, and that allows us to regard Wordsworth as a fellow of the great English sonneteers of the past, like Sidney, Shakespeare, and Milton.

CHAPTER II

The five hundred and thirty-five¹ sonnets that Wordsworth composed over a period of nearly fifty years form a collection of poems that illustrates the poet's mind at work within a single genre during almost his entire career as a writer. Many of these sonnets celebrate or record actual events in Wordsworth's life and his responses to these events, providing us with illuminating autobiographical material that supplements and enriches that of The Prelude. A study of the sonnets, if it is to contribute to a wider appreciation of the poet's work, must take into account not only his achievements in these poems but also their relationship to the development of his works in general. Indeed, Wordsworth himself explicitly asks us to view his "minor pieces" as part of the great whole.² Realization of this is, of course, of the first importance, and any discussion of a particular branch of the poetry, if it is to arrive at an understanding of the poet's peculiar sensibility and the truths of his writing, must consider the numerous links which establish it as part of the whole. Granted this, one may yet say that, in a number of respects, the sonnets form a significant self-sufficient collection of material from which to advance certain propositions about the poet's attitudes and habits of mind, and from which to measure his poetic powers in his early poems against those of his advancing years.

¹This number includes a curtailed sonnet of twelve lines, "On Milton", which Wordsworth identified as a sonnet (PWO, III, 574), a caudate sonnet "It is no Spirit who from heaven hath flown" (PWO, II, 263-64), the Dedication "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Lonsdale, K.G., etc. etc." at the beginning of The Excursion (PWO, V, 1), the irregularly rhymed sonnet in "Ode : The Morning of the Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving. January 18, 1816" (PWO, III, 159), and a sonnet not published in PWO, "When slow from pensive twilight's latest gleams" (William Wordsworth : Poems, Volume I, ed. John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 88; hereafter cited as Wordsworth : Poems, I). The number excludes sonnet XIX of Poems Composed or Suggested During a Tour, in the Summer of 1833, "By a Retired Mariner", which, according to Wordsworth, was written by a friend (PWO, IV, 405).

²PWO, V, 2, "Preface to the 1814 Edition of The Excursion".

We may first note that the sonnet became a favourite type of composition with the poet after about 1815, in that during this period he wrote more sonnets than other types of lyric. It is thus in the sonnet that we find some of the most important examples of Wordsworth's poetic activity in the later years and a comprehensive record of his concerns during this period. The Prelude stops short of these years for which the sonnet, a literary kind shown by Kenneth Muir to be regarded by numerous critics and poets as an autobiographical "confession", becomes one of our main poetic sources of information about Wordsworth's life.³

Secondly, there is no comparable branch of Wordsworth's poetry where the poet is as productive of so many poems in one genre for as long a period. Their themes throughout are those of his poetry in general : man, nature and human life subject to "the law supreme / Of that Intelligence which governs all",⁴ the "one great Life".⁵ The sonnet provides a fixed point of reference from which we can trace the writer's developing interests in these themes, and in the form; interests which emerge clearly if the poems are studied in an arrangement that takes into account the order of composition. To illustrate these shifts of thematic and structural emphases, a chronological grouping will be adopted, as far as possible; this chapter and the following two dealing respectively with sonnets written before 1819, the sequences of the 1818-22 period, and the sonnets composed after 1820, a date which is sometimes regarded as the last year of Wordsworth's great poetry, and which would seem to constitute a turning point in his poetic concerns and in his use of the form. Furthermore, these categories provide a convenient grouping in terms of numbers : there are from a hundred and fifty to two hundred poems in each of the three units. The River Duddon, 1820 Tour and Ecclesiastical sequences, which form the subjects of Chapter III, belong chiefly to the years 1818-22, and are examples of series which have a preconceived or intentional design. Wordsworth's own sonnet categories such as

³ Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare's Sonnets (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp.112-22.

⁴ PWO, V, 3, Prospectus, ll.21-2.

⁵ PWO, V, 338, MS. B's version of Prospectus, l.13.

Miscellaneous Sonnets, Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty and Liberty and Order will not be taken into account as points of departure : he re-arranged the order of his sonnets, shifted poems from one class to another, revised (often heavily), and dates of composition within these categories vary considerably. To study the sonnets in these classes would be inconsistent with the aims of this thesis.

Wordsworth's search for order is apparent in all his poetry. Man is subject to "the law supreme" and is governed by natural laws from the "school sublime"⁶ which teach him eternal truths, one of which is rightful freedom. Law, or restraint, is always a condition for the poet of such freedom which is granted to man by "all the blended powers of Earth and Heaven",⁷ when he finds harmony in an otherwise disordered universe. It is then that he can "converse with immortality"⁸ and "feed upon infinity".⁹ The theme of liberty is a central preoccupation of the sonnets, and the emphasis on law (and lawlessness) seems to be greater in these poems than elsewhere. The sonnet's "scanty plot of ground" would appear to be the ideal form in which to give expression to the poet's utterances about freedom and restraint, the structure itself imposing binding conditions upon one who has felt "the weight of too much liberty".¹⁰ Carl R. Woodring, in his article "on Liberty in the Poetry of Wordsworth", points out that, as an artist, Wordsworth "released greatest energy when pressing free creativeness against barriers of poetic convention : hence his greatest poetry of liberty comes in sonnets, poems, and passages of tense, controlled, articulate, counterpointed explosion".¹¹ "Nuns

⁶ PWO, III, 128, "Composed while the Author was Engaged in Writing a Tract, Occasioned by the Convention of Cintra", l.9.

⁷ PWO, III, 125, "On a Celebrated Event in Ancient History", l.14.

⁸ PWO, III, 131, "O'er the wide earth, on mountain and on plain", l.14.

⁹ Prelude (Maxwell), p.515, XIV, l.71.

¹⁰ PWO, III, 1-2, "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow Room", l.13.

¹¹ Carl R. Woodring, "On Liberty in the Poetry of Wordsworth", PMLA, 70 (1955), 1039.

fret not at their convent's narrow room" and "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned"¹² contain what are probably the most explicit of Wordsworth's poetic comments about the form, but there are also at least three other sonnets which contain references to the composition of such a poem;¹³ and there is, in addition, a large body of his critical prose writing on individual sonnets and on the genre in general. It is widely acknowledged that Wordsworth is a skilled technician in many forms; it does not seem to be as well recognised that he is one of the great masters of the sonnet form. For this reason, his sonnets are of especial significance in an evaluation of his poetry.

Finally, Wordsworth's reaction to historical events which feature prominently in the sonnets provides us with ample evidence of his attitude to the world around him. These events, private and public, include those in which he was directly involved and those which affected the world of his time. Taken in conjunction with his prose writings on the same subjects, they make an important contribution to the picture we have of the younger and older man and poet as he thought and felt during nearly five decades of his life.

The material of Wordsworth's sonnets is rich and varied and the number of these poems is great. As it is the intention of this thesis not only to trace the developing interests of the poet in sonnet but also to correct the impression that the later years are barren of sonnets in which the imagination is active, some sort of an overview of the collection must be attempted. In an effort to show what Edith Batho has said of the poetry in general, that "Wordsworth's production after 1815...contains much that is good, some that is magnificent, and little that is positively bad",¹⁴ I propose to focus chiefly on the sonnets that have been given less critical attention than those widely agreed upon to be the poet's masterpieces. The latter cannot be

¹² PWO, III, 20-21.

¹³ PWO, III, 1, "Happy the feeling from the bosom thrown"; 38, "Conclusion. To—"; 58-59, "Serving no haughty Muse, my hands have here".

¹⁴ Edith C. Batho, The Later Wordsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1933), p.315.

entirely neglected, of course, if the overview is to be a fair one. In this way, it is hoped to show that the great body of poems contains more fine sonnets than has generally been supposed.

Wordsworth began his sonnet writing as an apprentice to Milton. In matters of form, theme and tone, many of the early sonnets resemble those of his predecessor to whom tribute is frequently being paid in the poems both explicitly and by way of quotation and allusion. But, inevitably, a poet who is to become a great sonneteer will adapt the form to his own needs and develop it to accommodate his own poetical character. As Wordsworth himself said, the "predecessors of an original Genius of a high order will have smoothed the way for all that he has in common with them; - and much he will have in common; but, for what is peculiarly his own, he will be called upon to clear and often to shape his own road".¹⁵ Wordsworth becomes progressively less dependent on the Miltonic model as his sonnet topics diversify and as he begins to compose sequences (which Milton did not attempt). To show how Wordsworth, initially in apprenticeship to Milton, begins to develop sonnet patterns and themes that both differ from those which first inspired him and reflect his growing ability to advance the form is the principal aim of this chapter on the period 1802 to 1820.

There are six (or possibly seven) sonnets which were probably written before 1802. One, "Written in a Grotto", is attributed to Wordsworth conjecturally only, and, of the six known to be by him, one is a translation of Petrarch's Se la mia vita d'all aspro tormento.¹⁶ None is similar in structure to Milton's, and none of this group resembles another in any remarkable way. With the exception of the Shakespearean quatorzain and the translation, they are irregular sonnets. Of these youthful poems, one is conspicuous for its superior quality and evinces a real understanding of sonnet, even if it is not a great poem. "When slow from pensive twilight's latest gleams" is experimental in the sense that the writer seems to be feeling his way in both the Petrarchan and Elizabethan modes : it falls quite

¹⁵ PWO, II, 426, "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815).

¹⁶ PWO, III, 575-76; PWO, I, 308.

obviously into an octave and a sestet, yet there is a concluding couplet and one of the octave rhymes is picked up again in the sestet; abba oddc beeb ff. The Elizabethan pattern of three quatrains and a couplet is suggested in the rhyme scheme even though the rhymes are not alternating. But, although an octave rhyme sound recurring in the sestet might weaken the sense of doubleness in the poem, and although it is not always easy to present such doubleness in a descriptive sonnet, Wordsworth yet shows an awareness of the two stages of the argument of the Italian model and the result is a profoundly moving descriptive poem.

When slow from pensive twilight's latest gleams
 'O'er the dark mountain top descends the ray'
 That stains with crimson tinge the water grey
 And still, I listen while the dells and streams 4
 And vanished woods a lulling murmur make;
 As Vesper first begins to twinkle bright
 And on the dark hillside the cottage light,
 With long reflexion streams across the lake. 8
 The lonely grey-duck darkling on his way
 Quacks clamorous; deep the measured strokes rebound
 Of unseen oar parting with hollow sound
 While the slow curfew shuts the eye of day 12
 Soothed by the stilly scene with many a sigh,
 Heaves the full heart nor knows for whom, or why.¹⁷

A mood is created through landscape and natural forms observed at dusk, the octave presenting the visual aspects of the scene, the sestet the aural (as darkness falls). The presence of the speaker, linking the two parts of the poem as he watches and listens, is brought into the foreground in the last two lines. In a sense, he is the product of the scene and his mood is concentrated and announced as such in the couplet. There is a structural pause at the conclusion of the octave and a sense of a turn after the eighth line with the unexpectedly loud sound of the duck and the oar coming after the faint evening sounds of nature. But the implied idea of something sustained, which seems to develop naturally from the image of the cottage light stretching out across the water to the flight of the duck across the sky, softens the break in the poem. It would seem that consciously or unconsciously Wordsworth is attempting to create at this point the unity within the sonnet form that he later perceived in Milton's compositions, and that he tried to imitate in some of his own.

¹⁷ Wordsworth : Poems, I, 88.

The star, the cottage, and twilight are poetic items which appear regularly in Wordsworth's poetry with greater profundity of symbolic meaning in his mature writing than they show in this largely descriptive poem. The twilight, for example, which Wordsworth loves, does not have the sublime connotations that it comes to have later. These are articulated most clearly in "Hail, Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour!", a sonnet composed before 1815, where twilight is said to "remove from sight / Day's mutable distinctions".¹⁸ In the early poem it is the beauty of the evening scene that impresses the poet, but the idea of twilight as a time when "mutable distinctions" are erased and the permanent is glimpsed is incipient in the couplet:

Soothed by the stilly scene with many a sigh,
Heaves the full heart nor knows for whom, or why.

Some years later, this time of day is regarded as a "friendly veil" for Ellen in The Excursion who seeks refuge in books from the burden of her suffering;¹⁹ and in "Maternal Grief" (1813-14) twilight "to the Mother's wish / Befriends the observance".²⁰ Later still, in "On the Power of Sound", twilight is invested with the property of mercy:

... lone bell-bird, toll
At the still hour to Mercy dear,
Mercy from her twilight throne²¹
listening...

A concern of the poet's, early and late, it is always a beloved time. But, when one is young, at a time when ageing and mutability are not matters of immediate importance, "Twilight is preferred to Dawn, / And Autumn to the Spring".²²

The early "Twilight" sonnet quoted above is a fore-runner of the numerous masterly sonnets of its kind (that is, descriptive of Nature) which are to be found throughout Wordsworth's mature work. In an article on "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets" (1947),

¹⁸ PWO, III, 31.

¹⁹ PWO, V, 215; VI, 900-01.

²⁰ PWO, II, 53, ll.66-67.

²¹ PWO, II, 324, ll.27-29.

²² PWO, IV, 95, "Ode to Lycoris, May, 1817", ll.21-22.

John Bard McNulty, attempting to show that Wordsworth developed a high order of sonnet independently of Milton's example, illustrates the first stage of his argument with lines from the sonnet "Written in Very Early Youth".²³ The promise of far greater sonnets that he considers to be implicit in these lines is much more apparent in the example discussed here; and, could he have had knowledge of this poem, first published by Hayden in 1977, his argument would no doubt have carried more weight than it does, unsupported as it is by the best example of the group.²⁴

Between 1802 (after Dorothy's reading of Milton's sonnets) and 1820, Wordsworth wrote over a hundred and forty individual sonnets, possibly a hundred and forty-three altogether. His own errors in dating and the absence of any irrefutable proof of dates of composition in the case of some of the poems make it difficult to ascertain the exact number, but a hundred and thirty-five of these had been published by 1820, and the remaining eight are presumed by both De Selincourt and Hayden to have been composed by this time, or by 1822 at the latest. The fact that certain years were more productive of sonnets than others within this period seems to indicate not so much that Wordsworth filled in time writing sonnets from "want of resolution to take up anything of length"²⁵ but that he was inspired by the form. He was always aware of the demands of this form,²⁶ and periodically excited by it. For example between 1802 and 1807 (when the Poems in Two Volumesⁱ was published) the sonnets total sixty-eight, and as few as six are conjecturally assigned to the years 1817 and 1818. The largest output belongs, naturally, to the 1819-22 period when Wordsworth was chiefly engaged in writing sequences : almost two hundred sonnets were produced in these years.

²³ John Bard McNulty, "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets", PMLA, 62 (1947), 745-51.

²⁴ For Havens's reply to McNulty's article, see Raymond D. Havens, "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets", PMLA, 63 (1948), 751-52.

²⁵ See Ch. I, p.1 of this thesis.

²⁶ The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth, ed. Markham L. Peacock, Jr. (1950; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p.149.

By 1800, Wordsworth had composed a number of his greatest poems. "Tintern Abbey", "Michael", the "Immortality Ode", to name but a few, had been published in the Lyrical Ballads which was densely populated with poems of the highest imaginative quality despite a few interesting failures, and despite some which Wordsworth made ^{changes to} for later editions.²⁷ By 1802 when he takes up the sonnet form, he has mastered a range of technical skills and his works are those of a mature writer. It is therefore understandable that, while his thematic interests develop over the nineteen years, there is little advancement of skill to be traced in the structure of the poems. This is not to say that Wordsworth does not experiment and does not vary his sonnet techniques : he does both, and diverse sonnet patterns are an outstanding feature of the collection. But, from the start, the poems evince the adroit handling of form and metrical ease that we might expect of the author of the best of the Lyrical Ballads. Sonnets like "It is not to be thought of that the Flood", "The world is too much with us", "Westminster Bridge", "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic", "London, 1802" and many others were all composed in the first year of inspiration, and are amongst the finest that he wrote. They contain the "noblest and deepest" that there is in Wordsworth,²⁸ and their execution is that of a skilled performer.

What does emerge in the way of formal development, however, particularly once Wordsworth starts to move away from Milton's immediate influence, is an increasing tendency to disguise the traditional sonnet divisions in ways quite different from those with which Milton's example had provided him. The influence of the earlier poet is apparent in Wordsworth's sonnets throughout his career, and the use of the three-part structure which he inherited from Milton²⁹ is undoubtedly the principle that determines the shape and organisation of his own poems. But, as I hope to show in surveying the sonnets of this period, Wordsworth's eventual adaptation of the pattern to

²⁷ See, for example, PWO, II, "The Thorn", 240-48; "The Reverie of Poor Susan", 217; "The Brothers", 1-13; "The Idiot Boy", 67-80; PWO, IV, "The Old Cumberland Beggar", 234-40.

²⁸ Havens, p.530.

²⁹ See Ch. I, pp.35-38 of this thesis for a discussion of this principle of Milton's sonnet form.

his sonnet needs is his own bold, revolutionary contribution to the form, productive of some interesting effects which the form had not before displayed. The summaries of characteristic structural patterns and thematic interests that follow will serve as an introduction to an evaluation of these poems.

Seventy-seven of the hundred and forty-three sonnets have abba abba octaves, fifty-seven rhyme abba acca, and nine have irregular rhyme schemes. Seventeen conclude with a couplet, and of these six have the regular Petrarchan octave. This might suggest that Wordsworth disapproved of a departure from the classical Italian form, as Johnson proposes,³⁰ or it might be that the poet believed the sonnet to be better balanced if all the couplets in the poem are rhymed on different sounds. The poems do not provide sufficient evidence to justify a claim for either of these suppositions as anything more than an opinion, and the intricacy of the relationships between rhyme and form, and rhyme and meaning, precludes the possibility of applying one set of principles to all of the sonnets involved. But an unwillingness to sacrifice the correctness of the traditional form would seem to be inconsistent with Wordsworth's practice, and with his theory. He readily introduced a third rhyme into the octave, and whole-heartedly approved Milton's practice of continuing the sense of the octave into the sestet without a pause at the end of the eighth line. It was only once he had recognised a modification of the regular model that, according to his own remarks, he perceived the possibility of unity within the form and "took fire". Wordsworth believed that the poems of the Lyrical Ballads were "materially different" from those which generally receive approval, and he was aware that his readers might consider that he had failed to fulfil the terms of a "formal engagement" that an author enters into, in which he "will gratify certain known habits of association".³¹ Yet neither of these considerations prevented him from publishing the poems. He never yielded his inner convictions to the expediency of public acceptance (though he did make alterations on occasions when he felt criticism

³⁰ Johnson, p.27.

³¹ PWO, II, 385, "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads".

to be justified). It seems unlikely, then, that he would strive to preserve the correctness of a structure which, he is reported to have said, "is so artificial".³² By describing it as "artificial", Wordsworth might possibly have meant "rigid" or "excessively formal"; he almost certainly meant the remark to convey disapproval. His vision of sonnet possibilities allows for a poem to be sonnet even when it does not conform to strict sonnet requirements : he singled out fourteen lines from Paradise Lost, for example, as "a perfect sonnet without rhyme".³³

The cd cd cd or cdc cdc rhyme scheme in the sestet (and de de de or ded ded when there are three rhymes in the octave) is favoured by Wordsworth, but not to any remarkable degree. Of this group of sonnets, approximately twenty percent are rhymed in this way; the rest are rhymed on the usual sestet variants of two or three rhyme sounds. Most of the poems (sixty-three in all) have a structural pause at the end of the octave; and after this a turn in the middle of line 9 is the most common practice. Often, the turn is difficult to locate or is disguised and, on a number of occasions, there seems to be either no turn or more than one. The latter phenomenon is usually to be found when the subject or theme of the sonnet is announced about halfway through the poem, or when the three parts of the sonnet are so distinct that two turns of thought can be distinguished. This arrangement sometimes take the form of an observation leading to a conclusion or statement of theme, followed by moralising sentiments, a mode of expression peculiarly suited to Wordsworth's mind.³⁴

³²Peacock, p.149.

³³H.C.R. : Books and Their Writers, II, 484-85.

³⁴Examples of sonnets in which the turn is difficult to locate or disguised: PWO, III, 109, "Calais, August, 1802"; 14, "Composed on the Eve of the Marriage of a Friend in the Vale of Grasmere, 1812"; 138-39, "The French and the Spanish Guerillas". Some sonnets which seem to have no turn: PWO, III, 9-10, "Written upon a Blank Leaf in 'The Compleat Angler'"; 37-38, "Gordale"; 41-42, "A Parsonage in Oxfordshire". Examples of sonnets with more than one turn: PWO, III, 150-51, "Occasioned by the Battle of Waterloo. February, 1816"; 131, "And is it among rude untutored Dales"; 115-16, "Written in London, September, 1802"; 2-3, "'Beloved Vale!' I said, 'when I shall con'".

The sonnets composed throughout this period turn mainly on liberty and its concomitant circumstances and conditions. Private sonnets ranging widely in topic are written concurrently with the public and political quatorzains, and a number of these, too, are about freedom. Wordsworth's love of freedom is expressed in nearly all of his poetic forms and includes individual freedom as well as political liberty. A poet, according to Wordsworth, must attain personal freedom if he is to reach the heights of imagination. On more than one occasion in his poems and his prose he refers to the "wings" of a poet, allusions which, for one who values liberty so highly and whose poetry is essentially the expression of freedom, are to more than the conventional attribute of a poet. They are heartfelt references to the condition which Wordsworth regarded as indispensable for successful composition.³⁵ In his attempt to define a poet in the Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, he claims:

The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.³⁶

Wordsworth's ideas on liberty permeate his poetry. Nature and a rural life fostered his own sense of personal freedom for which the accessibility of solitude, or relative solitude, is a prerequisite. As Woodring has noted, for Wordsworth solitude proves advantageous to freedom, and "enjoyed in the light of Nature [it] bestows the conditions for imagination and for freedom to hope. Moments of solitude, hope, freedom, and imagination are available for all; the poet, more imaginative and therefore more free than other men, differs not in kind but in degree."³⁷ The sonnets "Not 'mid the World's vain objects that enslave" and "Personal Talk" contain leading statements about the rural

³⁵ PWO, II, "preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads", 396; PWO, IV, 74, "Personal Talk", III, l.1.

³⁶ PWO, II, 395.

³⁷ Woodring, p.1039.

solitariness and retiring way of life that Wordsworth's sense of individual freedom requires.³⁸ It is under such conditions that high ideals can be nourished and noble thoughts born; and, in the correct balance of these and a simple life, is to be discovered a state of harmony which, it has already been pointed out, is productive of rightful freedom for the individual man.³⁹

The subjects of public liberty and personal freedom remain a concern of the poet's until the last but they are gradually replaced as a central theme in the sonnets after 1820 by Wordsworth's developing interest in mutability and tranquillity, more relevant concerns perhaps for the poet who had become less sensitive to restraint than the young man whose independent means were as yet not secure, and whose enthusiasm for the French Revolution had fired his imagination. Wordsworth started to write in the genre at a time when liberty, generally, was at stake, when England was threatened by Napoleonic tyranny and later, when all European nations came under the shadow of domination. His early political ideals had suffered a severe undermining and

he was struggling with his own difficulties, with fears of the loss of poetic vision and with uncertainty about the future. In the sonnets before 1820 we can record a series of responses - to historical events, to public occasions, and to more personal events - which are for the most part intense, immediate and vigorous.

The early sonnet of liberty, "It is not to be thought of that the Flood", is strongly Miltonic in both execution and subject matter, like so many of the Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty. As Johnson has observed, it is in the earlier examples, from 1802 to about 1806, that Wordsworth's indebtedness to Milton is most apparent.⁴⁰ In this particular sonnet, he pays tribute to his predecessor in addition to identifying himself with the faith and morals of the earlier poet. In matters such as the use of enjambment, delayed

³⁸ PWO, III, 128; PWO, IV, 73-5.

³⁹ See p.45 above.

⁴⁰ Johnson, p.45.

volta, energetic tone and sentiments expressed, it is patterned on Milton's own:

It is not to be thought of that the Flood
 Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
 Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
 Hath flowed, "with pomp of waters, unwithstood," 4
 Roused though it be full often to a mood
 Which spurns the check of salutary bands,
 That this most famous Stream in bogs and sands
 Should perish; and to evil and to good 8
 Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
 Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:
 We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
 That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold 12
 Which Milton held.—In every thing we are sprung
 Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold. 41

The strength of the flood metaphor and the driving force of the argument sweep across the quatrain divisions through the octave to the delayed volta in the middle of line 9 where the onward movement is temporarily checked by the illusion that is created of being bogged down, and by the change in rhythm in line 8 where the presence of evil, weighed against that of good (and the responsibility of man's choice between them), introduces a sobering thought. After the volta, the vigour of the debate is resumed, aided by the open rhymes of the sestet, until a noble resolution is reached that has had as its past champions both Shakespeare and Milton. Their dedication to the cause of liberty is central to Wordsworth's own beliefs and, in this poem, embodies, for him, the strength that lies behind England's heritage.

The allusion to Shakespeare in lines 11-12 is given direction by the quotation from Daniel's The Civil Wars of England (line 4) which is from Book II of the poem where an account is given of Richard II's betrayal and the desertion of his followers. Thus the language of Shakespeare that is referred to would seem to be that of his history plays and, specifically, of the theme of England as it is presented in these plays. In stanza 7 of Daniel's poem, from which the quotation is taken, an analogy is drawn between leading Englishmen and the Thames, and Bolingbroke and the ocean, and, at this point, Richard has yielded up State, Rule and Crown to "all-receiving" Bolingbroke:

⁴¹ PWO, III, 117.

And looke, how Thames, inricht with many a Flood,
 And goodly Riuers (that haue made their Graues,
 And buried both their names and all their good
 Within his greatness, to augment his waues)
 Glides on, with pompe of Waters, vnwithftood,
 Vnto the Ocean (which his tribute craues)
 And layes vp all his wealth, within that powre,
 Which in it felde all greatnes doth deuowre:
 So flocke the mighty, with their following traine,
 Vnto the all-receiuing Bullingbrook:
 Who wonders at himfelfe... 42

This description of the Thames, a symbol of England's greatness, both illuminates and gives traditional weight to Wordsworth's flood metaphor, and contributes to the theme of national spirit. The quotation sheds some interesting light on other parts of the sonnet as well.

Wordsworth's having the Elizabethans in mind would seem to direct and channel the reference to the "invincible Knights of old", as if the topic is chivalry seen in terms of England's history. And the concluding phrase of the poem, "have titles manifold", considered in the light of Daniel's lines, becomes more than the somewhat unrelated addendum that it at first appears to be: the image of the river, temporarily dropped after the volta, reappears in the final lines of the sonnet in the form of a spring or fount of life. To the water image has been added the image of human descent ("of Earth's first blood"), and contributing to the strength that the poet sees to be at the source of England's heritage are the "great names and all their good" which have mingled with the waters of the flood.

In line 11, Wordsworth turns to the simple and austere language of unmetaphorical statement, announcing his subject: "We must be free or die". The recurrence of the river image in modified form in the last lines returns us to the octave, creating of the sonnet a unified whole. A circular shape is suggested which may be an example of what Wordsworth meant in 1833 when he used the image of an "orbicular body" to explain his idea to Alexander Dyce of the configuration of the typical sonnet: "Instead of looking at this composition as a piece of architecture, making a whole out of three parts, I have been much in

⁴²The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel, ed. Rev. Alexander B. Grosant (London: Hazell, 1885), II, 57-8.

the habit of preferring the image of an orbicular body, - a sphere - or a dew-drop".⁴³ In keeping with this theory, Wordsworth's habit is to prefer three parts to two; namely, to use his own terms, a "beginning", a "middle", and an "end". In this poem, ^{mention of the} the tide of British freedom which has flowed from the beginning of time, the references to past codes of honour, and the return to the idea of our national origin, could be seen as the three parts, but as co-present with and subordinate to the two larger movements of the octave and sestet. No single pattern is allowed to dominate, however; by sweeping over the quatrain limits, by delaying the volta, and by sustaining the image of the river, Wordsworth overcomes any sense of distinct breaks, and successfully achieves "a pervading sense of Unity".⁴⁴ The entire sonnet is a mimetic parallel (more examples of which are discussed in greater detail later on in this thesis) of the flood's impetuous course of freedom threatening to break out of confinement, the twin ideals of liberty and restraint being suggested by the form itself.

In the above sonnet, Wordsworth turns to the past and to Milton's spirit as the great defenders of a liberty which is needed to sustain an England over whom hangs the threat of invasion. The tide of her freedom does not always flow without restriction: in "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour", it has become a "fen of stagnant waters" and, on a note of despair this time, Wordsworth calls on Milton's code of honour to fortify England in her hour of need.⁴⁵ "Great men have been among us; hands that penned" is a similar glorification of the British past, with the difference that it is France, on this occasion, whose moral strength is being presented as wanting.⁴⁶ In those sonnets which are concerned primarily with the failure of the French Revolution and a Europe in bondage, Wordsworth's fears for England are temporarily suspended. "Composed by the Seaside, near Calais, August, 1802" expresses the poet's fears for his

⁴³ LY 1831-40, p.653.

⁴⁴ See Ch. I of this thesis, pp. 13 and 36.

⁴⁵ PWO, III, 116.

⁴⁶ PWO, III, 116-17.

country but, as yet, her liberty is threatened only from without.⁴⁷
 And, on Wordsworth's return to his native soil from France, his joy,
 soon to be dissipated, manifests itself for the present in a vision of
 a free England:

Europe is yet in bonds; but let that pass,
 Thought for another moment. Thou art free,
 My Country! and 'tis joy enough and pride
 For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass
 Of England once again...⁴⁸

One hour of "perfect bliss" inevitably gives way to despair as the
 forces of oppression seem too powerful to be withstood, and threaten
 to extinguish all that is good:

No grandeur now in nature or in book⁸
 Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,
 This is idolatry; and these we adore:
 Plain living and high thinking are no more:
 The homely beauty of the good old cause¹²
 Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
 And pure religion breathing household laws.⁴⁹

The reference in line 9 to Milton's sonnet to Fairfax:

In vain doth valour bleed
 While avarice, and rapine share the land.⁵⁰

suggests that, with the voice of the seventeenth century republican
 behind the poet's own, some hope remains that England may not become a
 danger to herself. The exhortation in lines 5 and 6 of the same poem
 to the British to uphold the ideals of liberty carries the same
 suggestion of a possibility of redemption:

We must run glittering like a brook
 In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:

But the fearful reminder, conveyed in the negative of "unblest", cannot
 be ignored, coming as it does from a poet for whom blessings are
 synonymous with the glory of nature's light; a light which, once
 extinguished, would leave the world in the darkness of chaos.

⁴⁷ PWO, III, 109.

⁴⁸ PWO, III, 114, "Composed in the Valley near Dover, On the Day
 of Landing".

⁴⁹ PWO, III, 116, "Written in London, September, 1802".

⁵⁰ The Poems of John Milton, ed. Carey and Fowler, pp.322-23.

Wordsworth's poetry is essentially the poetry of praise and a sense of being blessed seldom deserts him.

Wordsworth's fears for his country are crystallized in "October, 1803" which has as its occasion Napoleon's domination of Europe:

I find nothing great:
Nothing is left which I can venerate;
So that a doubt almost within me springs
Of Providence, such emptiness at length
Seems at the heart of all things. ⁵¹

But, characteristically, the poet does find a means with which to counteract the emptiness which seems to be at the heart of everything: when all else fails, including nature's guardianship, there remains a fortress in man's soul:

though Nature's dread protection fails,
There is a bulwark in the soul. ⁵²

At least two other sonnets of this time explicate the idea of man's standing alone, his soul the last but most resistant defence against all powers of oppression. The resounding conclusion to "September, 1802. Near Dover" is that "by the soul / Only, the Nations shall be great and free".⁵³ And at the centre of "Another year!—another deadly blow!", composed in 1806, lies the knowledge

That in ourselves our safety must be sought;
That by our own right hands it must be wrought;
That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low. ⁵⁴

This, as Wordsworth tells us in Book XI of The Prelude, is the only solution when there appears to be no hope:

But indignation works where hope is not,
And thou, O Friend! wilt be refreshed. There is
One great society alone on earth:
The noble Living and the noble Dead. ⁵⁵

⁵¹ PWO, III, 120.

⁵² PWO, III, 131, "And is it among rude untutored Dales", ll.5-6.

⁵³ PWO, III, 115.

⁵⁴ PWO, III, 122.

⁵⁵ Prelude (Maxwell), p.457, XI, ll.392-95.

Wordsworth would seem to be saying here that the "noble Living" are those who live in hope and can "stand unpropped"; and the "noble Dead" are those whose lives are immortalized because they were men who never abandoned hope. His own soul had been at its lowest ebb at this time when, he informs the reader - but with the aid of hindsight - he was led into betrayals of truth by

a heart that had been turned aside
From Nature's way by outward accidents,
And which was thus confounded more and more,
Misguided, and misguiding. ⁵⁶

In the sonnets quoted and referred to above, the poet is not viewing his state of mind and the state of the world in retrospect, and the failure of nature's protection is the immediate truth. The natural forces that worked for Toussaint l'Ouverture, the air, the earth, skies and wind,⁵⁷ have lost their power to work for a world whose liberty is succumbing to blow after blow. The noble life of the soul is freedom's last fortress.

The reader is informed in The Prelude that it was the poet's love of truth and its reward that rescued him from an abyss of hopelessness and prompted him to turn to abstract science. He was later restored to his true self by the influences of Dorothy and of Nature herself.⁵⁸ Amongst the sonnets, which record a variety of responses from triumphant praise of liberty to acute despondency, is one which announces that it was a sense of duty that saved Wordsworth from losing sight of hope altogether:

Here pause: the poet claims at least this praise,
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope
In the worst moment of these evil days;
From hope, the paramount duty that Heaven lays,
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart. ⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Prelude (Maxwell), pp.451-53, XI, ll.290-93.

⁵⁷ PWO, III, 112-13, "To Toussaint L'Ouverture".

⁵⁸ Prelude (Maxwell), pp.453-57, XI, ll.321-70.

⁵⁹ PWO, III, 140, "Here pause: the poet claims at least this praise".

But, whether it was from a love of truth or from a sense of man's moral obligation to hope that the poet found the courage to confront the world again, the quality that lay behind both was the same : a moral strength that, like Milton's, could help the man to survive severe affliction and the poet to create, out of suffering, poetry of a sublime nature.

Wordsworth personifies Liberty in three of these public poems, and each case is a magnificent example of the sonnet's becoming a trumpet in the hands of its author. The degree of personification is slight : Wordsworth renounces human features as in another sonnet he renounces "human cheeks" or "limbs" for the brook he did not wish to envisage as a Naiad.⁶⁰ In the famous sonnet "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic" (1802), Venice, "the eldest Child of Liberty", is wed to the sea.⁶¹ Wordsworth's personification of the city is not much developed beyond that of a city which is usually regarded as feminine, and that of this particular city, Venice, which already exists in the symbolism of the annual ceremony conducted by the Doge.⁶² She is personified further only as the child of Liberty, as a force rather than a human form. In fact, Wordsworth treats the personification in such a way that she seems a great power somewhat like the sea; she seems to exist as a being somewhere between Man himself and a great force of Nature. It is the man-made city which is being used by the poet as the vehicle for Liberty, but the Sea, one of "the great appearances in Nature",⁶³ is brought into the personification and is an example of the literal image becoming symbolic that we find in so much of Wordsworth's treatment of natural imagery. There is no need for him to galvanize or energize the sea, the mountains or the wind more than he does, possessed of life as he believes them to be. Wordsworth's belief that life is present in natural forms often inclines him to the literal in his image-making. What David Perkins

⁶⁰ PWO, III, 35, "Brook! whose society the Poet seeks", ll.6-10.

⁶¹ PWO, III, 111-12.

⁶² PWO, III, 453.

⁶³ Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), II, 864.

has said of the breeze in "I wandered lonely as a cloud" applies to Wordsworth's use of nature imagery generally: "To call it [the breeze] a figure of speech scarcely conveys the immediacy of Wordsworth's vision. To convert a literal fact into a symbolism is a very common process of mind. With Wordsworth, however, one feels that the symbolic becomes literal." Perkins adds that, in Wordsworth, "life is virtually synonymous with motion", and he quotes the lines from "Tintern Abbey" where the poet speaks of

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. ⁶⁴

Innumerable passages from the poetry illustrate the way in which Wordsworth imbues nature with life and, in the case of this sonnet, the Sea is one of the "types and symbols of Eternity"⁶⁵ as it is elsewhere. The union of Venice with the sea is thus an act that symbolizes the highest form of freedom, and the personification of Liberty (or of Venice) is a means of immortalizing the city, the idea of which is revered by the poet, even though

the Shade
Of that which once was great, is passed away.

In the equally well-known "Two Voices" sonnet, composed probably about four years later, Liberty is once again personified as a high-souled maiden, recalling Milton's nymph of the mountains.⁶⁶ Writing about the poem in The Friend, Coleridge said that it was "one of the noblest sonnets in the language, and the happiest comment on the line of Milton 'The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty', which would be no inapt motto for the whole collection".⁶⁷ Here, as before, liberty is seen as synonymous with vast elemental forms - with the sea again, and with the mountains:

⁶⁴ David Perkins, Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p.195.

⁶⁵ Prelude (Maxwell), p.241, VI, l.639.

⁶⁶ PWO, III, 115.

⁶⁷ PWO, III, 454.

Two Voices are there; one is of the sea,
 One of the mountains; each a mighty Voice:
 In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
 They were thy chosen music, Liberty! 4
 There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee
 Thou fought'st against him; but hast vainly striven:
 Thou from thy Alpine holds at length art driven,
 Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee. 8
 Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft:
 Then cleave, O cleave to that which still is left;
 For, high-souled Maid, what sorrow would it be
 That Mountain floods should thunder as before, 12
 And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
 And neither awful Voice be heard by thee!

On this occasion, a great power of sound is released by the personification of Liberty, a power that is both taken up and controlled by the pattern of rhyme (abba acca dda eea) which is used to develop the impression of a harmony such as is to be found in a musical composition. The "a" rhyme's reappearing in the sestet, but there enclosing yet another new rhyme sound (e), suggests the return of the first movement, in the form of a variation; and the pattern created by the "a" rhyme's enclosing each couplet rhymed on a new sound (b, c, d, e) imposes an ordering on the poem that mimics the art of music (to which Wordsworth refers in line 4). In addition, the closing phrase of the octave, "heard by thee", is repeated as the final phrase of the sestet, forming part of the variation on the first movement that is far from being mechanical. A unity of sound is thus completed that must have contributed, in part, to Wordsworth's remark that the sonnet was the best that he had written.⁶⁸

The third and latest of the three sonnets on public Liberty, "Advance - come forth from thy Tyrolean ground" (1809), has as its personified figure of liberty Milton's nymph of the mountains, this time directly and overtly alluded to. A detailed examination of the poem will reveal its Miltonic character but also the peculiar Wordsworthian qualities that are in some respects more pronounced than in the two foregoing sonnets.

Advance - come forth from thy Tyrolean ground,
 Dear Liberty! stern Nymph of soul untamed;

⁶⁸ The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth : The Middle Years, 1806-11, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), I, 241; hereafter cited as MY.

Sweet Nymph, O rightly of the mountains named!
 Through the long chain of Alps from mound to mound 4
 And o'er the eternal snows, like Echo, bound;
 Like Echo, when the hunter train at dawn
 Have roused her from her sleep: and forest-lawn,
 Cliffs, woods and caves, her viewless steps resound 8
 And babble of her pastime!—On, dread Power!
 With such invisible motion speed thy flight,
 Through hanging clouds, from craggy height to height,
 Through the green vales and through the herdsman's bower - 12
 That all the Alps may gladden in thy might,
 Here, there, and in all places at one hour. 69

Mary Moorman has pointed out that Switzerland was already part of the Romantic imagination when Wordsworth and Robert Jones went on their tour to Europe in 1790.⁷⁰ But Wordsworth's personal experiences of the Alps led to their becoming, next to England, his most loved region. The number of sonnets that he devoted to Napoleon's attacks on Alpine peoples is an indication of how acutely he felt these onslaughts on what was, for him, one of the greatest bulwarks of liberty and, furthermore, a region in many ways similar to his own environment. This sonnet, composed in 1809, the year in which the Tyrolese were finally defeated, is one of several that Wordsworth wrote in the same year on the Tyrolese mountaineers and their rebellion against the French. Six sonnets, all but the last composed in 1809, are about the Tyrolese uprising and their final submission, as if Wordsworth was writing despatches on a campaign as it took place. "Alas! what boots the long laborious quest" which contrasts the efforts of the Tyrolese with the state of Germany at the time is followed by "Feelings of the Tyrolese" and "Advance - come forth..." which celebrate the people who would die to preserve their freedom. "Hofer" is a tribute to Andreas Hofer who led his people against the French in 1796, and in 1809 before they were finally subjugated ("On the Final Submission of the Tyrolese"). Then, a sonnet composed in 1810, "The martial courage of a day is vain", returns to the subject of the Tyrol and its champion, Hofer, who had been

Murdered, like one ashore by shipwreck cast,
 Murdered without relief...⁷¹

⁶⁹ PWO, III, 129-30.

⁷⁰ Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth : A Biography. The Early Years, 1770-1803 (1957; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p.128.

⁷¹ PWO, III, 130; 130; 129; 131-2; 133.

In the sonnet quoted above, Liberty, who wears no fetters in her soul,⁷² seems to need no second bidding from the poet to come forth. Once aroused from the mountains of the Tyrol where she dwells, she advances through the Alps until the entire region is filled with her presence. The mimetic effects which contribute to the impression that we get of her almost immediate omnipresence are multifold, but thought, feeling, and expression are harmonized in so thoroughly a Wordsworthian way that the poet's craft seems scarcely to intrude upon the reader's consciousness. Like many other Romantic poets who strove for the effects of spontaneity, Wordsworth does not call attention to the inventions of his craft in creating a poem that appears to be "a spontaneous generative act of expression taking place through a moment of time".⁷³ In this poem, we see the poet seeming effortlessly to transcend the barriers of the sonnet and involve the reader in the process of an immediate and dynamic experience.

In an extended comparison, Liberty is compared to Echo, both personified as forces of life in nature. Wordsworth's obvious delight in his subject is reflected in the choice of Echo as a spirit kindred to that of the mountain nymph. In Nature he found a "never-failing principle of joy / And purest passion",⁷⁴ and echoes feature prominently in his life and in his poetry, occupying a special place in his scheme of things. Man for Wordsworth responds to nature through the senses (the visual and the aural especially) which lead him beyond the physical world until he glimpses the meaning of existence itself. Echoes seem to be representative of the power behind the universe which, in Book IV of The Excursion, Wordsworth compares to a shell that imparts

Authentic tidings of invisible things;
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation.⁷⁵

⁷²PWO, III, 118, "There is a bondage worse, far worse, to bear".

⁷³Perkins, p.47.

⁷⁴Prelude (Maxwell), p.97, II, ll.450-51.

⁷⁵PWO, V, 145, ll.1144-47.

This idea is nowhere more beautifully illustrated than in "There was a Boy" where the hullabaloo of "quivering peals, / And long halloos and screams", set up by the boy's hootings, the owl's replies and the echoes, dies away to a "lengthened pause / Of silence" which with "a gentle shock of mild surprise" carries into his heart the voice of nature herself.⁷⁶ The boy is thus assimilated into the natural scene, as it were, and echoes seem to be part of the activation. A doubling of words, phrases and images dominates the entire passage (as it does in the above sonnet) imitating, in the verse, the work of the echoes. John S. Martin, in his article on "Wordsworth's Echoes", has noted that, in addition to being regarded as the intelligences of an immortal life, echoes relate to Wordsworth's theory "that poetry itself is the expression of echoes, or recollections, of past experience. For just as echoes are for Wordsworth reverberations of a higher reality, so experiences reverberate in the mind to acquire, by virtue of the imagination, spiritual force and ideality, which in turn give rise to poetry."⁷⁷ In The Prelude passage about the Winander boy, this is certainly the case : the poet's memory is exercised in such a way that echoes of past experience are superimposed on the present view of the episode, producing a double consciousness - or "two consciousnesses" as Wordsworth called it⁷⁸ - that gives rise to a hauntingly beautiful presentation of the young boy imitating the owls, the event spiritualized by the older poet's imaginative experience of the scene in his mind.

For Wordsworth, the power of echo would seem to be greatest at dawn, as in the sonnet quoted, or in the evening, as it is here, when there is relative silence and solitude which, together, can lead to an immediate communion with nature. The Prelude passage that describes such a blend of the two properties and its influence on the poet merits quoting here in full, as echo would seem to be part of the "ghostly language of the ancient earth" that Wordsworth hears, even if it is

⁷⁶Prelude (Maxwell), pp.189-90, V, ll.364-88.

⁷⁷John S. Martin, "Wordsworth's Echoes", English Language Notes, 5 (1968), 190.

⁷⁸Prelude (Maxwell), p.75, II, l.32.

only the echo of silence. The poet recalls the impression made on him as a boy by the transitory and permanent features of the changing seasons, and continues:

Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
 More active even than 'best society' -
 Society made sweet as solitude
 By inward concords, silent, inobtrusive
 And gentle agitations of the mind
 From manifold distinctions, difference
 Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,
 No difference is, and hence, from the same source,
 Sublimer joy; for I would walk alone,
 Under the quiet stars, and at that time
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form
 Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
 If the night blackened with a coming storm,
 Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
 Thence did I drink the visionary power;
 And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
 That they are kindred to our purer mind
 And intellectual life; but that the soul,
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, whereto
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,
 With faculties still growing, feeling still
 That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
 Have something to pursue.⁷⁹

The soul's remembering "how she felt" and not "what she felt" seems to be part of the silent language that is like a type of echo, the type that recalls past experience which, Wordsworth said, had such "self-presence" in his mind that he seemed to be two consciousnesses, conscious of himself and of another Being.⁸⁰ The words "inward concords" similarly suggest the possibility of the kind of echo that Martin has equated with the reverberation of experience in the mind which gives rise to poetry.

In the sonnet (quoted on pp.64-65 above), echoic effects are set up from the start. They begin in the opening line where "come forth"

⁷⁹ Prelude (Maxwell), pp.89-91, II, ll.294-322.

⁸⁰ Prelude (Maxwell), pp.73-75, II, ll.30-33.

mimics "Advance", and continue in more exact doublings, repetitions or structural parallels. The "Sweet Nymph" of line 3 is an echoic response to the "stern Nymph" of the preceding line, a pairing which reveals her co-existent qualities of love and dedication to duty. She moves

Through the long chain of Alps from mound to mound
And o'er the eternal snows...

and in the echo of "mound" with the repetition of the nasal resonants, in the enjambment and the slow pace of the monosyllabic line, an illusion of length is created that suggests the great distance covered by Liberty. A reverberation is set up in lines 5 and 6 when the onomatopoeic phrase "like Echo" is repeated, and the re-echoing of sound is intensified by the implied reference to the horn and halloos of the hunters, the naming of lawn, cliffs, woods and caves, until the entire surface of the earth seems to be participating in the "babble" of Echo's "pastime". Such a "jocund din" and "concourse wild"⁸¹ abound that it is as if the volta, delayed to the middle of line 9, is a pause not only for breath but also for the tumult to subside so that the poet can resume. Wordsworth is almost certain to have had in mind lines from both A Midsummer Night's Dream and L'Allegro (which itself contains at least four allusions to Shakespeare's play) in this description of Echo and the hunt. In L'Allegro the poet asks to be allowed to live with the nymph, Euphrosyne (Mirth), and the "mountain nymph, sweet Liberty" when together they may listen to

how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumb'ring morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill. ⁸²

And, in A Midsummer Night's Dream (IV.i.106-15), Theseus bids Hippolyta go with him to the mountain top to listen to the "musical confusion / Of hounds and echo in conjunction". Hippolyta in reply gives an account of a hunt she attended with Hercules and Cadmus where

never did I hear
Such gallant chiding, for, besides the groves,

⁸¹Prelude (Maxwell), p.191, V, ll.378-79.

⁸²The Poems of John Milton, p.135, L'Allegro, ll.53-56.

The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seem'd all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder. 83

Wordsworth could hardly help remembering these lines, and the scene from L'Allegro, but he makes a fully independent series of statements which yet recall these literary occasions.

The octave - one sentence which runs across the normal quatrain limits - is different from that of the Flood sonnet which seeks to convey an onward driving force. Here, the speed and agility of Echo are emphasized in the enjambment and in the various pausal effects in the lines which contribute to a sense of the sound filling the spaces, rather as does a musical pause when a note is sustained. This impression - of freedom moving in all directions and filling all space - is continued in the thematic "a" rhymes of the octave which trace the upward progression of the force from "ground" to "mound", and which then call attention, in "bound" and "resound", to its ability to cover vast distances. Further echoic effects are set up in the resonant character of the "nd" consonants combined with long vowels in these rhymes.

But it is in the sestet that the figures of Liberty and Echo (separated until now by the formal comparison) merge into an inseparable image. Their combined strength fills the heavens as well as the earth, from the "hanging clouds" to the "herdsman's bower" until it is

Here, there, and in all places at one hour.

There is no real turn of thought at the volta which the poet follows with another adjuration to Liberty to speed on her way. But the substance of the sestet seems to be of a greater intensity than that of the octave's, as freedom's welcome conquest spreads to the limits of the Alps. This density is again partly achieved by structural doublings : the phrase "invisible motion" in the sestet which echoes "viewless steps" in line 8 is more generalized and abstract than its counterpart, and the phrase "from height to height" which parallels the octave's "from mound to mound" is constructed from weightless sounds which suggest a form of transcendence. The last line, still

⁸³William Shakespeare : The Complete Works, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1951), p.216.

concerned with the effect of echo, brings the sonnet to a conclusion that is the logical outcome of the destination of a force that is too powerful to be checked. But its impact is nevertheless great : the implication of an entire region united in time and space by the forces of liberty gives us a clear insight into Wordsworth's vision of an ordered universe in which all things are part of the "one great Life".⁸⁴ It is a fine statement of his belief in the freedom that is granted to man when all the powers of earth and heaven blend, and completes the impression that we have been gaining of the sonnet as a poetic kind whose released energy transcends its own barriers. The Romantic concern with mimesis is in powerful evidence in this sonnet whose whole form expresses meaning. It presents a moment of process simultaneously contained by the consciousness of the poet and seeming to go beyond the structural limits of the poem.

Closely related to the theme of liberty is Wordsworth's idea of the humble as an ennobling influence. This tends to give rise to quieter sonnets of a less public nature than the political poems - to melodies of the lute and pipe rather than to strains of the trumpet - and, correspondingly, to a structural approach more suited to this particular subject and not as closely modelled on Milton's. Examples of the theme, or variations upon it, are by no means limited to the sonnets of a personal nature. The strength that is to be found in "magnanimous meekness" (a main concern of the poems on the subject of Independence and Liberty) is the genuine power of a free nation, and it has been understood and perpetuated by great moralists like

The later Sydney, Marvel, Harrington,
Young Vane, and others who called Milton friend. ⁸⁵

Milton's character as it appeared to Wordsworth, a composite of the noble and the humble, provided him with the ideal example of such a combination in human nature:

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,

⁸⁴ See p.44 above.

⁸⁵ PWO, III, 116, "Great men have been among us...", ll.3-4.

So didst thou travel on life's common way,
 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.⁸⁶

Wordsworth's vision of this ideal synthesis - of godliness and lowliness - is expressed or implied in countless different ways as desirable in man, nature and the universe. In the sonnets on liberty, mankind is adjured to notice the moral influence of a humble life, and simplicity as an essential component of a noble nature. In a sonnet on Buonaparte, we are told that true power is built on the twin foundations of a sternness of mind and a meekness of thought.⁸⁷ The co-existence of the same two qualities is responsible for Liberty's greatness. In the personification of Liberty in "Advance - come forth from thy Tyrolean ground", we saw a somewhat similar blend (of the sweet and the stern).⁸⁸ And in "Alas! what boots the long laborious quest" which contrasts the struggle for freedom by the Tyrolese with the condition of Germany at the time, the herdsmen of the Alps are seen as men who, bred by nature's rule and instincts, have contributed more to the good of mankind than have all of Germany's "haughty Schools" which pride themselves on their intellect and thought.⁸⁹ The tract on "The Convention of Cintra" which Wordsworth was writing in 1808 and 1809 gave rise to an impressive sonnet on the plight of the Spanish nation which is also a beautiful tribute to Nature's school of learning, the school of disinterested and unrestricted thought:

Not 'mid the World's vain objects that enslave
 The free-born Soul—that World whose vaunted skill
 In selfish interest perverts the will,
 Whose factions lead astray the wise and brave— 4
 Not there; but in dark wood and rocky cave,
 And hollow vale which foaming torrents fill
 With omnipresent murmur as they rave
 Down their steep beds, that never shall be still: 8
 Here, mighty Nature! in this school sublime
 I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain;
 For her consult the auguries of time,
 And through the human heart explore my way; 12

⁸⁶ PWO, III, 116, "London, 1802".

⁸⁷ PWO, III, 110-11, "I grieved for Buonaparté, with a vain".

⁸⁸ See p.69 above.

⁸⁹ PWO, III, 130.

And look and listen—gathering, whence I may,
Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain. 90

This poem is a key sonnet in terms of Wordsworth's themes. Inspired by "The Convention of Cintra", it has as its subject the sufferings of Spain, yet it is an intensely personal poem whose focal point is the author's consciousness rather than the subject matter of the tract. It is a skilfully constructed example of Petrarchan sonnet (regular except for one subtly-integrated departure in the rhyme scheme of the second quatrain in the octave), its classic two-part structure used to present, in the octave, the poet's meditations on the contrasting worlds of human vanity and nature, and to resolve, in the sestet, the argument about the freedom of the soul to contemplate justly. The poem contains so much that is central to Wordsworth's beliefs about man's relationship to nature that the reader is left with the impression, finally, that all that has been assimilated leads to the heart and mind of the poet. The poem is an affirmation of a remark made by Wordsworth to Daniel Stuart at the time of the Convention: "[M]y heart is deeply interested in this affair. Never did any public event cause in my mind so much sorrow...."⁹¹

Wordsworth presents the world as a place that is unfit for his heart-searchings about Spain. It is the world that "is too much with us" and in which we "have given our hearts away",⁹² and it is also the world ravaged by "unholy deeds" where "ruthless mortals wage incessant wars".⁹³ In both of these sonnets, "The World is too much with us; late and soon" and "Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake", as in this poem, the poet is seen in his chosen area contemplating the problem of a world that has become alienated from nature. Here, the world is seen as a heartless place where vanity, selfish interest and dissension enslave, pervert and lead astray those who follow its principles. By contrast, Nature leads the poet along a course that is always instructive, "that never shall be still", but is ever constant in its

⁹⁰ PWO, III, 128.

⁹¹ MY, 1806-11, p.257.

⁹² PWO, III, 18-19, "The World is too much with us; late and soon".

⁹³ PWO, III, 127, "Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake".

changelessness. The dark wood, rocky cave and hollow vale, all analogies for "the human heart", through which Wordsworth explores his way, are the proper places for the poet to learn about the human condition as, there, the primary laws of Nature teach the naked truth, without any embellishment or distracting influences to clutter the poet's mind.

A strong suggestion of the Shakespearean quatrain accompanies the Petrarchan octave-sestet movements, imposing a tight control upon the breadth of theme. The world that is "out of tune" is reflected by the poet's developing the discord implicit in the negative introduction "Not 'mid" through the first quatrain where each line contains a combination of labials, sibilants and fricatives (the consonants "w", "s" and "v") whose contrasting sounds (given the theme) suggest a lack of harmony. The second quatrain begins, like the first, with a negative adverb in the manner of some Shakespearean sonnets, but, unlike these poems, it does not develop a further denial of the positive through the four lines.⁹⁴ Instead, the opposing world of Nature is presented as possessing the qualities which are absent in the world of "vain objects". The same sound combinations are continued through this section and two enjambed lines are a further mirroring of the first quatrain whose pattern is to echo the second. This is done in order to present Nature as also in a state of agitation, but with the difference that it is not undisciplined or confused. The darkness of the wood and cave and the foaming torrents that are never still are obedient to natural laws, and Nature's law, if properly understood, is freedom. It is in conditions like these that Wordsworth is able to reflect, in the presence of truth, on the affairs of Spain. The dissimilarity between the two worlds is emphasized by a difference in the matching quatrains : a change in the rhyme pattern - from abba to abab - skilfully stresses their incompatibility, and separates the two.

The sense of a tripartite structure superimposed on the doubleness of the poem is continued in the sestet where the first four lines both provide the answer to the question implied in the negative statement of the first quatrain, and develop the substance of the second.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Shakespeare's Sonnets, pp.15-16, no.14; p.44, no.49; p.63, no.71; pp.63-64, no.72; pp.84-87, no.98; p.120, no.141.

However, the resolution proceeds smoothly to the final line of the sestet, thus insisting upon a bipartite structure as the dominant pattern in the poem. Therefore the sonnet may be said to develop in two stages but with a complication of its movement, provided by the presence of another pattern which helps to conceal an obvious division into two parts and to suggest three parts to the poem.

Nature's way of austerity and discipline has, for Wordsworth, an ennobling influence, teaching man right values of impartiality and correct judgement. This sonnet has as its occasion a political event, but its centre is a private one. The poet is seen to be standing in a solitary position at the heart of nature which fosters the conditions for imagination and for the freedom to hope.

Between the years 1802 and 1820, Wordsworth wrote a number of sonnets which are poems of praise for the common world. Beloved features of his region, vanishing rural customs and domestic pleasures are the chief topics of these poems whose essentially modest themes seem to be a far cry from the noble subjects of the sonnets on public liberty. And so they are in a number of respects. It is Wordsworth's intention to present these aspects of his life and his region as home-spun and humble: he regarded their simplicity as invested with a sacred character and their influence on the minds of men as morally beneficial. In defence of his choice of incidents and situations from common life in the well-known passage from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth spells out his belief in their importance:

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from

their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets....⁹⁵

Those sonnets which focus on particular landscapes or features of the Lake District landscape (and in later years on buildings) develop the eighteenth century preference for the picturesque in sonnet, and those which pay tribute to apparently trivial experiences or things are certainly not suited to strains of the trumpet. Yet one should be on guard when confronted with the simple or the ordinary in Wordsworth : it is often, at such times, that he is at his most complex or most philosophical. Charged by some (including Coleridge)⁹⁶ of being too matter-of-fact, by others of being too simple, he can be read, and has been read, on an elementary level. Speaking of Wordsworth's presentation of landscapes in his study of Wordsworth in Time, John Beer argues that

[w]e become aware that in spite of familiar names and identifiable vistas this universe is one which is being recreated and reorganized in Wordsworth's own mind - that the features of it which recur are in some sense selected features, constituting a universe which exists not simply as a landscape in time and space but as a psychoscape, reflecting some area of his own nature. Behind the exoteric world of nature which can teach us some straightforward moral lessons about our human status there looms a universe hardly less visionary than Blake's, yet more carefully guarded since presented with the commonsense aspect always uppermost.⁹⁷

There is not only a complexity of vision or thought to watch out for in Wordsworth's poetry. There are also poetic devices which are deliberately used to give depth or an added dimension to the meaning, whether observation or description, and which, in the case of some of these sonnets that celebrate the commonplace or unknown, help to

⁹⁵ PWO, II, 386-7.

⁹⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge : Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson, rev. ed. (London: Dent, 1975), p.251.

⁹⁷ John Beer, Wordsworth in Time (London: Faber, 1979), p.17.

elevate the subject. These devices may be no more than allusions, or conventions, but they are worth noting as they remind us that Wordsworth can use quite ordinary poetic means to make the commonplace significant.

Two sonnets composed before 1805, "Brook! whose society the Poet seeks" and "There is a little unpretending Rill",⁹⁸ exalt two of Wordsworth's native streams above those which Grecian artists immortalized and those which enjoy world fame. In the case of both the brook and the rill, the stream is measured in terms of its meaning for the poet, and both sonnets reflect the pleasure that Wordsworth received from the smaller features of nature in Cumbria. The rill which trickled down the hill-side into Lake Windermere was the scene of a halt made by the poet and his sister in their first visit together to that part of the district, and he composed the sonnet some years later to commemorate the happy occasion. Such ordinary sights grow in significance not only because they are praised by Wordsworth, who loves them, but also because they are compared to classical or other famous sights that are found wanting. The references to the much-praised and well-known scenes help to remind us that the poet who is celebrating the common world is qualified to do so because he is familiar with, or at least has knowledge of, those scenes which have been glorified before his time. The allusion (and sometimes compression of allusion) gives traditional impetus to the poet's utterances and informs us that he is writing in a convention; an act which helps to elevate his subject.

A sonnet of the same period, "Pelion and Ossa flourish side by side",⁹⁹ (wherein Mount Skiddaw is upheld as "nobler far" than the Greek mountains about which poets have sung praises for centuries) is one such example of allusion lending weight to the poet's claim that the mountain of the Lake District has as much right to be glorified as had its famous counterparts in Greece. By recalling Spenser's celebration of Parnassus in the quotation from Virgil's Gnat in lines 4 - 5, Wordsworth again establishes himself as writing within and

⁹⁸ PWO, III, 4-5.

⁹⁹ PWO, III, 3-4.

developing a tradition in which Skiddaw now has a part. A later poem, "Aerial Rock - whose solitary brow" (1819), uses a somewhat different means of paying tribute to a mountain of Wordsworth's home region:

Aerial Rock - whose solitary brow
 From this low threshold daily meets my sight;
 When I step forth to hail the morning light;
 Or quit the stars with a lingering farewell—how 4
 Shall Fancy pay to thee a grateful vow?
 How, with the Muse's aid, her love attest?
 —By planting on thy naked head the crest
 Of an imperial Castle, which the plough 8
 Of ruin shall not touch. Innocent scheme!
 That doth presume no more than to supply
 A grace the sinuous vale and roaring stream
 Want, through neglect of hoar Antiquity. 12
 Rise, then, ye votive Towers! and catch a gleam
 Of golden sunset, ere it fade and die. 100

The rock, a projecting point of Loughrigg, looks quite naked from Rydal Mount, and Wordsworth, contemplating a way to give proof of his love for the natural feature, seeks to adorn its head with an imaginary castle "which the plough of ruin shall not touch". It may at first seem surprising that Wordsworth should wish to complete a natural scene with a man-made structure. Nature is almost always presented by him as self-sufficient and independent of man. But, though built by man, castles are usually regarded by Wordsworth as part of their surroundings, and as supreme in their domains. He views them almost as an extension of nature or as having been blended with the natural scene during the passage of time. In a sonnet composed after 1820 (probably between 1824 and 1827), the ruins of a castle in North Wales are described as receiving gentle treatment from Time who lays his "lenient touches" upon the pile, his seasons entwining wreaths of foliage around its brow.¹⁰¹ A still later sonnet, "Address from the Spirit of Cocker-mouth Castle" (1833), makes the same point that time and nature have worked to assimilate the castle into the natural scene.¹⁰² In "At Furness Abbey" ("Here, where, of havoc tired and rash undoing"),

¹⁰⁰ PWO, III, 7.

¹⁰¹ PWO, III, 42, "Composed among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales".

¹⁰² See Ch. IV, pp. 199-203 of this thesis for a discussion of Wordsworth's sense of kinship with castles.

written in 1840, time and nature are regarded - as opposing forces which, yet, combined, have the power to absorb an abbey into its surroundings and into their own cycles:

Here, where, of havoc tired and rash undoing,
 Man left this Structure to become Time's prey,
 A soothing spirit follows in the way
 That Nature takes, her counter-work pursuing.
 See how her Ivy clasps the sacred Ruin,
 Fall to prevent or beautify decay;
 And, on the mouldered walls, how bright, how gay,
 The flowers in pearly dews their bloom renewing! 103

The castle to be erected on Aerial Rock is so like Kilchurn Castle which the poet and his sister came across in Scotland in 1803, in respect of its relationship to its surroundings, that one cannot but help feel that Wordsworth must have had the Scottish castle and scene in mind when he composed the sonnet. The first three lines of "Address to Kilchurn Castle, upon Loch Awe" were composed on the spot in 1803, and the rest of the poem was written years later (before 1827). The lines which describe the castle in its setting had therefore not been composed at the time of "Aerial Rock", but Wordsworth seems to have had the impression of his visit fixed firmly in his mind. The second stanza begins:

Take, then, thy seat, Viceregent unreprieved!
 Now, while a farewell gleam of evening light
 Is fondly lingering on thy shattered front,
 Do thou, in turn, be paramount; and rule
 Over the pomp and beauty of a scene
 Whose mountains, torrents, lake, and woods, unite,
 To pay thee homage... 104

The poet adds that he and his sister are numbered among the vassals who show their reverence for the castle. Such homage Wordsworth pays to Aerial Rock in creating a castle for it that will rule the Grasmere area as its Scottish counterpart rules the Loch Awe surroundings. It differs from Kilchurn, however, in that it will be exempt from "the plough of ruin". It is as if Wordsworth is offering to preserve the castle through his verse, since Nature is unable to protect it in the usual way. The emphasis on time in the sonnet gives a significance to Wordsworth's "scheme" that might otherwise seem little more than a whim

¹⁰³ PWO, III, 62.

¹⁰⁴ PWO, III, 78.

of the fancy. We are made aware of the poet's mortality in the references to the daily cycle of his life in the first quatrain, and of the mountain as a symbol of eternity in the allusion to antiquity in line 12. The poet, who must die, is immortalizing his love, with the aid of the Muse, in the tradition of Petrarchan and Elizabethan sonnet, and, although the scheme exists in the imagination only, it is recorded in his verse which he entrusts to posterity. The images of time that are used - the "plough" of ruin and "hoar Antiquity" - echo those that appear in the sonnets of Shakespeare whose concern it is to eternalize his love for the friend. Wordsworth is redirecting these sonnet tendencies by immortalizing his love for an appearance of nature and by paying it the kind of tribute that the Elizabethans usually paid to a human being.

Tributes are occasionally paid by Wordsworth to people of lowly birth or of modest habit who live, or have lived, in the poet's region, and, in these cases too, Wordsworth invests their humble and unpretentious ways with a form of greatness. In a sonnet of 1806, "Though narrow be that old Man's cares, and near",¹⁰⁵ he dignifies an old man of his acquaintance by attributing to him the imagination of a poet. The epigraph from A Midsummer Night's Dream:

—gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.¹⁰⁶

refers to the habit of a poet, and the octave of the sonnet describes the old man's imaginative powers in terms that Wordsworth might well use to explain the workings of his own. A sense of the old man's kinship with the poets is thus established. Wordsworth found him "a great curiosity, both individually and as a representative of past times",¹⁰⁷ and seems to respect both the idea that his superstitious beliefs are grounded in a bygone age and his solitary habits.

The old man is not, however, a solitary of the kind that we find in poems like The Prelude, "Resolution and Independence", "Ruth",

¹⁰⁵ PWO, III, 34.

¹⁰⁶ William Shakespeare : The Complete Works, p.218, V. i. 16-17.

¹⁰⁷ PWO, III, 429.

"Michael" and many others. He is described as alone within his empire, but he has the company of the creatures of his dreams, and Wordsworth does not concentrate on the solitude of his position. The solitaries are generally figures or emanations of the landscape, often described in terms of nature or of their surroundings. They possess a stature which has an element of mystery about it for which the condition of solitude is partly responsible. If there is a solitary in the sonnets, it is the poet himself, as, for example, in the River Duddon sequence. And in sonnets such as "Aerial Rock", "I watch, and long have watched, with calm regret",¹⁰⁸ and "Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle", an impression is gained of a meeting of two solitaries; of the poet with a mountain, a star and a castle, all three of which seem to represent the spirit of the place in a way that the human solitaries themselves often do. But types like the discharged soldier, the Leechgatherer, Ruth and Michael are absent from the sonnets or, if they do appear (as does one in "September 1, 1802"),¹⁰⁹ they remain undeveloped. It could be argued that Wordsworth simply wrote on certain themes and subjects in his sonnets, and did not treat others in the genre, but it is also possible that it is a question of form. The solitaries are customarily presented in a narrative or within an incident, with details of their backgrounds or lives contributing to the effect that is created of strangely powerful figures. The sonnet form simply cannot support the relatively expansive presentation that is generally required to create a full picture of a solitary. It is a curtailed poem and is seldom used for narrative purposes (except possibly in sequence), its chief concern being with the presentation of an idea or a thought, and with resolution. One could say that the solitaries themselves embody a form of resolution : they are the incarnations of a faithful adherence to nature and, as such, are complete or have become complete either by enduring the vicissitudes of life and triumphing, or by adapting to their circumstances. Wordsworth, of course, is concerned with their effect upon himself in these poems, and, in that sense, he has something to learn from them and usually something to resolve. It would

¹⁰⁸ PWO, III, 22-3.

¹⁰⁹ PWO, III, 113-14.

seem, then, that one could safely suppose only that such accounts as those that Wordsworth usually gives of the solitaries are chiefly in a narrative form and, as such, unsuitable for sonnet.

To conclude this tracing of themes that illustrates the poet's love for his region and for the common world, I shall focus on a sonnet of 1815 and a few related poems that exemplify the sense of loss that Wordsworth felt at the disappearance of cottage industry from the Lake country. Although the Lake District did not become a manufacturing centre, the effects of the industrial revolution (and later the agricultural revolution) were beginning to be felt in the latter part of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁰ These consequences manifested themselves in the form of rural depopulation, a breakdown of the family unit and, in some cases, dire poverty. Cottagers who had previously made a living out of carding or spinning were forced by the new factories either to move to manufacturing towns or to find employment away from their homes as labourers. In turn, small landowners who depended on the cottage industries were affected, and, with the passing of Land Enclosure Acts after 1760, countrymen lost the little security they had received from farming common land. Wordsworth's distress at the decay of rural society is expressed in numerous poems about displaced people, vagrants and suffering peasant families, and his attitude to the changes brought about from manufacturing in the country is conveyed, amongst other sources, in The Excursion, where the Wanderer gives an account of such changes:

...if to these Wayfarers once pertained
 Aught of romantic interest, it is gone.
 Their purer service, in this realm at least,
 Is past for ever.—An inventive Age
 Has wrought, if not with speed of magic, yet
 To most strange issues. I have lived to mark
 A new and unforeseen creation rise
 From out the labours of a peaceful Land
 Wielding her potent enginery to frame
 And to produce, with appetite as keen
 As that of war, which rests not night or day,
 Industrious to destroy! 111

¹¹⁰For this section on the agricultural revolution, I am generally indebted to Kenneth Maclean, Agrarian Age : A Background for Wordsworth (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950).

¹¹¹PWO, V, 268, VIII, 84-95.

The art of spinning and its influence on the harmony of family life is mentioned as contributing to the peaceful existence of the Priest and his family in The Brothers,¹¹² a poem written in the years 1799 and 1800; and in Michael (written at about the same time according to Wordsworth), the spinning wheel becomes a symbol of a wholesome life of industry when it is described as

Making the cottage through the silent hours
Murmur as with the sound of summer flies. 113

In the sonnet "Through Cumbrian wilds, in many a happy cove", the act of spinning is again seen as promoting love and harmony, and as responsible for turning unproductive freedom into productive industry.

Through Cumbrian wilds, in many a happy cove,
The pastoral muse laments the wheel—no more
Engaged, near blazing hearth, on clean-swept floor,
In tasks which guardian angels might approve, 4
Friendly the weight of leisure to remove,
And to beguile the lassitude of ease;
Gracious to all the dear dependencies
Of house and field,—to plenty, peace and love. 8
There too did Fancy prize the murmuring wheel;
For sympathies, inexplicably fine,
Instilled a confidence—how sweet to feel!
That ever in the night calm, when the sheep 12
Upon their grassy beds lay couched in sleep,
The quickening spindle drew a trustier line. 114

In the octave, the effects of a spinning wheel that is now "mute" are shown to have been widespread. By moving inwards, from the outer reaches of Cumbria, through the cove, and into the cottage to focus finally on the wheel itself, Wordsworth is indicating that no part of the region remains unaffected by the change that has taken place. The pastoral muse has been banished from the humble home to the wilds, an act that is presented as severing all normal ties of affection by the contrast struck between the remoteness of the landscape (where the muse now dwells) and the warmth within the cottage. The importance of the spinning wheel for Wordsworth may be deduced from his inclusion of

¹¹²PWO, II, 1-13.

¹¹³PWO, II, 84, ll.127-8.

¹¹⁴PWO, III, 409.

the pastoral muse in the circle that used to gather around the wheel. There is a suggestion that spinning is an ancient art which has existed alongside the art of pastoral poetry that has depended upon the wheel for many of its scenes of rustic life and its themes of ideal human relationships. This idea - of spinning as an art - is developed in another sonnet of similar theme, composed at about the same time, wherein Wordsworth says that Grief has lost a friend, Care a comforter, and Love

-a charmer's voice, that used to lend,
More efficaciously than aught that flows
From harp or lute, kind influence to compose
The throbbing pulse—... 115

He appears to regard it as an art of motion that, like music or poetry, has the power to soothe and to create harmony. The sonnet becomes an expression of this harmony - between man and man, and between man and nature, with the wheel at the heart of it all. The wheel is seen, in the octave of the sonnet quoted on page 83, as acting as a desirable restraint on what could be unproductive freedom, turning such freedom into industry which yields "plenty, peace, and love". Furthermore, the diligence of the spinners is regarded by Wordsworth as a form of piety : in line 4 we are told that their tasks receive the sanction of "guardian angels". This aspect of the wheel's influence is treated more explicitly in a sonnet of 1814-19, "Composed in One of the Valleys of Westmoreland, on Easter Sunday", in which a cottage-dame is represented as possessing a sense of religious occasion and duty:

With each recurrence of this glorious morn
That saw the Saviour in his human frame
Rise from the dead, erewhile the Cottage-dame
Put on fresh raiment—till that hour unworn:
Domestic hands the home-bred wool had shorn,
And she who span it culled the daintiest fleece,
In thoughtful reverence to the Prince of Peace,
Whose temples bled beneath the platted thorn.
A blest estate when piety sublime
These humble props disdained not!... 116

Here, the emphasis is on the housewife's religious duty. In the Cumbrian wilds sonnet, it is a native folk belief that inspires the

115 PWO, III, 11-12.

116 PWO, III, 12-13.

industrious cottager to work into the night. The sestet presents the belief (enlarged upon in the poem "Song for the Spinning Wheel - Founded upon a Belief Prevalent among the Pastoral Vales of Westmoreland")¹¹⁷ that a fairy power will help the spinner to produce a finer and more durable thread when the sheep are asleep. An apparently trivial belief, it emerges as profoundly imaginative (even though Wordsworth calls it fancy) through the poet's seeing it as arising from a truth : the tranquillity produced by the sound and the action of the wheel finds a parallel in the calmness of the sheep asleep in their "grassy beds" outside. The imagery suggests a correspondence of the inner and outer worlds which is responsible for the satisfying state of completeness and order of which the wheel is the source. An impression is gained by the reader of the wheel's revolutions extending outwards to work the peaceful scene in nature into the fabric of which man is a part, the effect of which is also to press home the plight of the muse in the opening lines of the poem and to remind us that the poem is a lament for a passing way of life.

We saw, earlier in the chapter, that the Romantic poets are particularly alert to the possibility of expressive form.¹¹⁸ Here, as before, Wordsworth is concerned with the entire sonnet form as mimetic. In this particular case, the result is an aesthetic whole, with the total structure contributing to the idea of harmony and order that is engendered by the argument of the poem. In the first place, a balance of parts is suggested in a matching of syntactical patterns at the outer ends of the sonnet : the adjective + noun combinations in lines 1 and 2 are echoed in lines 13 and 14, and the enjambment of lines 2 and 3 is paralleled by that of lines 12 and 13. These patterns in the octave are thus balanced symmetrically in the sestet, reflecting a structural unity of the poem, a unity that is strengthened by the enclosing rhymes used in both octave and sestet.

Secondly, the measured rhythms of the two sentences of the sonnet, unbroken by any device such as exclamation, parenthesis or apostrophe, contribute to the even movement of the verse to which the sense of the poem has given a steady pace. In the smooth progress of the pace is

¹¹⁷ PWO, II, 150-51.

¹¹⁸ See p.71 above.

suggested the smooth action of spinning, and the quiet sounds set up by the peace that reigns within the home and of nature at rest outside seem to blend with the murmur of the wheel. In fact, we are left with the impression that the form is doing, with poetry, what the spinner is doing with the thread : both the even running and the sound of the wheel are represented in the verse. And then, in the sestet, the enclosing rhymes, "fine" and "line" help to suggest that the consideration presented here is being spun out of the fancy until something firm and true is affirmed in the last line. The overall effect is one of a poem complete in itself, and its aesthetic appeal serves to give poignancy to the poet's sense of loss, and to evoke our own. Like the Sage in The Excursion, we are led to grieve for the passing of an order that dignified those who belonged to it:

The smoke ascends
 To heaven as lightly from the cottage-hearth
 As from the haughtiest palace. He, whose soul
 Ponders this true equality, may walk
 The fields of earth with gratitude and hope;
 Yet, in that meditation, will he find
 Motive to sadder grief, as we have found;
 Lamenting ancient virtues overthrown,¹¹⁹

There are many sonnets like this one in which Wordsworth manages to suggest that three parts - a beginning, a middle and an end - are present in the poem even though it is structurally divided into two. Here, there is a movement from the outer landscape to an indoor centre, the heart of activity, and, from there, out into the natural world again. The sense and the spatial details thus assist the idea that there are three parts to the sonnet which otherwise adheres to the classical Petrarchan division. It should be borne in mind, however, that the Italian sonnet may seem to fall into three parts : two quatrains and a sestet (or even into four parts, if the sestet divides into two tercets). A sonnet which evinces a beginning, a middle and an end need thus only exploit these inherent divisions even if they are disguised. Sonnets such as this one (and in fact most of the examples discussed in this final section) prompt a cautious approach to the dictum that the poet always had a three-part structure consciously in mind. The remarks in the letter to Dyce which preface

¹¹⁹ PWO, V, 294 (IX, 245-52).

and conclude his general assessment of the structural principles of sonnet help to throw some light on both the poet's own uncertainty about the form and the elusive nature of the genre itself:

Though I have written so many [sonnets], I have scarcely made up my own mind upon the subject. It should seem that the Sonnet, like every other legitimate composition, ought to have a beginning, a middle, and an end—....

and

Instead of looking at this composition as a piece of architecture, making a whole out of three parts, I have been much in the habit of preferring the image of an orbicular body,—a sphere—or a dew-drop. All this will appear to you a little fanciful; and I am well aware that a Sonnet will often be found excellent, where the beginning, the middle, and the end are distinctly marked, and also where it is distinctly separated into two parts, to which, as I before observed, the strict Italian model, as they write it, is favorable. ¹²⁰

In fact, Wordsworth wrote as many sonnets that are distinctly divided into two parts as he did those that disguise their divisions, whether into two or three sections.¹²¹ Once he begins to move away from his apprenticeship to Milton, in the matter of sonnet writing, he becomes increasingly concerned with adapting the sonnet to the different needs of the subject that he is writing about at the time. The three-part rhetorical mode that he inherited from his predecessor does not always suit the theme in hand, and he uses it less and less as the emphases in his sonnet subjects shift from public liberty and private life to more generalized and objective contemplations of the problems of mutability and time; in the main, to his search for tranquillity and the promise of eternity.

¹²⁰ LY 1831-40, pp.652-53. See also Ch.I, pp.36-37 of this thesis.

¹²¹ At least 277 of the 535 sonnets are divided into two distinct parts.

CHAPTER III

The three sequences that form the subjects of this chapter, The River Duddon, Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820, and Ecclesiastical Sonnets, were composed for the most part between the years 1818 and 1822. A few of the sonnets in The River Duddon were composed before 1818 (one possibly as early as 1803-04) and one in the Memorials after 1822.¹ Thirty sonnets were added to the Ecclesiastical Collection at later dates. But, on the whole, the three series are representative of Wordsworth's sonnet writing during this period when the poet devoted greatest energy to the sequence as a genre.

The three cycles are examples of works with a "preconceived design", of a kind that Yarrow Revisited, whose "Apology" contains the well-known phrase, does not aspire to be:

No more: the end is sudden and abrupt,
Abrupt — as without preconceived design
Was the beginning...²

The earlier series, Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803, contains only two sonnets in a collection of seventeen poems, and the ^{poems of} Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837 are, by Wordsworth's admission, "inadequate remembrances" owing, in part, to the tour's being cut short by a report of cholera in Naples and, in part, to his omission of scenes and aspects of the journey, principally because he had written about them in poems belonging to other groups.³ Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order (1845) consists chiefly of sonnets taken from other collections which contribute little to the search for an overall design. Poems Composed or Suggested During a Tour, in the Summer of 1833 and Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death (1839-40) do have an external framework of a kind that unifies the series, but, as they are representative of the later years and as the length of this thesis allows for an examination of

¹ Sonnets XIV, XXVI and XXVII of The River Duddon and sonnet XXXVII of the 1820 Memorials.

² PWO, III, 279.

³ PWO, III, 202.

no more than the three cycles of the 1818-22 period, some of these poems will be discussed in Chapter IV in the context of their occasions only and not as part of their sequence.

By the time that Wordsworth came to compose his first sequence, he had already written over a hundred single sonnets, most of which had been published in the two classes, Miscellaneous Sonnets and Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty. His concern to build a large "architectural" structure of his poems, with all the parts related to each other and to the main body of the work,⁴ prompted him to group most of his poems according to common features such as thematic similarity, genre, and presence of what he called the imagination or the fancy. The Miscellaneous Sonnets is one such category that brings together poems, all in the same genre, which are largely about the poet's life in the Lake District. As such, it is a convenient grouping for sonnets that are "Transcripts of the private heart"⁵ - although exceptions such as "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned", "On the Detraction which Followed the Publication of a Certain Poem", "On the Death of His Majesty (George the Third)" and "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway", which have as their concern public rather than private occasions, are included in the collection.⁶ But, although the position of each sonnet is intended to contribute to the overall effect - of a record of the poet's life and interests at home in the Lake Region - there is no unifying framework or design (not even a strict chronology) to suggest that the sonnets are anything more than a collection which nevertheless profits from the grouping together of poems about the poet's private life.⁷ What Frost has to say about the collections of his own poems may well throw some light on Wordsworth's work in this field. Reuben A. Brower, in The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention, quotes the poet as speaking of

⁴ PWO, V, 2, "Preface to the 1814 Edition of The Excursion".

⁵ PWO, III, 38.

⁶ PWO, III: 20-21, 11, 40-41, 61-62.

⁷ For Johnson's view of the garden metaphor as establishing a framework for the Miscellaneous Sonnets, see his chapter on "The Garden of Miscellaneous Sonnets", pp.63-119, and especially p.77. His findings are ingenious but unconvincing.

looking backward over the accumulation of years to see how many poems I could find toward some one meaning it might seem absurd to have had in advance, but it would be all right to accept from fate after the fact. The interest, the pastime, was to learn if there had been any divinity shaping my ends and I had been building better than I knew. In other words could anything of larger design, even the roughest, any broken or dotted continuity, or any fragment of a figure be discovered among the apparently random lesser designs of the several poems? ⁸

Frost says that in reading the poems "progress is not the aim, but circulation. The thing is to get among the poems where they hold each other apart in their places as the stars do."⁹ From these "constellations of intention", by which phrase Brower sub-titles his book, arises the comment that the poems make on each other, and the interest that they promote in others in the same grouping. Wordsworth seems to be thinking along similar lines when, in explaining the division into classes of his poems, he informs us that the "most striking characteristics of each piece, mutual illustration, variety, and proportion, have governed me throughout".¹⁰

The series, Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, has more of a unity of design than the Miscellaneous Sonnets in that all the sonnets make a contribution to the central theme of liberty, and a fairly accurate historical chronology is observed. Wordsworth himself envisaged the poems as tracing the Stream of Liberty,¹¹ but the image existed more in the poet's conception of his work than as an organizational element of any measurable degree in the series. The poems can, however, be considered in one sense - that of possessing a single theme - as contributing to the larger ordering of the group. Yet each sonnet is an independent poem and is strictly occasional, on the Miltonic model. The focus of the collection is on the individual sonnet which does not mirror to any appreciable extent the multiple facets of the central theme. For a group of sonnets to qualify as a sequence, there must be some external unifying framework as well as

⁸ Reuben A. Brower, The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention (1963; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p.viii.

⁹ Brower, p.vii.

¹⁰ PWO, II, 34, "Preface to the Edition of 1815".

¹¹ PWO, III, 341, Ecclesiastical Sonnets, I.I, ll.5-8.

inter-relationships between the various sonnets. The wide range of occasions in these sonnets to liberty and the lack of any over-arching symbol or image, or clear narrative design, preclude the possibility of their forming a true sequence.

It could, nevertheless, have been the arrangement of these and the miscellaneous sonnets in groups of common theme or interest that helped to prepare the way for the sequences and tour series which Wordsworth began to plan in 1818. The attention that he gave to design in his poetry and in the grouping of his poems suggests the love for order and harmony that he wished to express through every aspect of his work . Given the Romantic penchant for amplitude and for the long poem, a sonnet sequence provides the kind of challenge to which a poet like Wordsworth, who is always interested in the effects of design, might well respond. In a number of ways, the sequence presents difficulties of design that a long blank verse poem or poem of rhymed stanzas does not have. As defined by the Princeton Encyclopedia, this genre (the sonnet cycle) is a "series of sonnets on a given theme or to a given individual. The effect is that of stanzas in a longer work but with the difference that each sonnet retains its integrity as an independent poem...From the earliest times the cycle has been used to amplify the limited scope of the single sonnet and to reflect the many facets of the chosen theme."¹² In any long poem, transitions between units have to be effected, as does the development of theme, image or narrative through each part. But the sonnet cycle imposes upon the writer the contingent demand that each unit be an autonomous, aesthetically perfected whole, in addition to its making a contribution to the larger ordering. An interrelationship between the smaller part and the larger totality thus poses what is probably the overriding difficulty in shaping a successful sonnet sequence. The use of the couplet to help solve this problem has already been considered.¹³

In my examination of the sequences that follow, the emphasis is chiefly on the design and relationship of parts of the cycle, and on Wordsworth's architectonic powers as seen on a fairly extensive scale.

¹²Princeton Encyclopedia, p.784.

¹³See Ch. I, pp.18-19 of this thesis.

This means that many of the sonnets that are invoked as parts of the sequence are not analysed in any detail, if at all; the concern being at the time with these sonnets as characteristic of the sequence type or with issues of the cycle as a whole. But some close attention is given to a few sonnets, selected to illustrate the excellence of some units as parts and as individual poems. In so doing, I hope to show that these sequences contain some fine poems, often neglected or mistaken as inferior by Wordsworth's critics.

It has already been pointed out that the three sequences selected for the subjects of this chapter, one section of a chronological study, are representative of the poet's sonnet practice between 1818 and 1822. As such, they properly belong here, but they have been chosen for two reasons besides. Each is an important example of the developments that occur in Wordsworth's poetic vision as he moves from concerns that are predominantly personal and subjective to a more objective contemplation of his subject matter in which there is evident a distancing from experience. Examined one after the other, moreover, these three sequences show different stages of this development in Wordsworth's thought, beginning with The River Duddon which, in some ways, fuses the vision of the early poetry with the late, and concluding with the Ecclesiastical Sonnets where the poet's personal experience is most clearly subordinated to his primary concern with the history of Christianity.

Secondly, these series are the three best examples, in my opinion, of careful design. In this respect, the 1820 Memorials is possibly the least interesting of the three: the design is less complicated and does not make as important a contribution to the final impression and meaning of the poem as it does in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets and in The River Duddon especially. For this reason and also because nearly a half of the Memorials is not sonnet, it has been given less space in this chapter than have the other two sequences.

I

Wordsworth's most successful sequence in respect of the relationship of the single sonnet to the sequence as a whole is The River Duddon series. In the first place, he brings to the genre the Romantic tendency to regard a poem as organic, the idea of vitality being skilfully

conveyed through the Duddon which has a dual role, as a literal river, running from its source in the mountains to the sea, and as an image, of the life cycle of one man (from birth to death) representative of the species. The poet moves with the Duddon, following its course, and his journey constitutes a third strand of life, or of movement, woven through the poem. The effect of the single sonnets, each of which reflects in some degree all or some of this variety of thematic and imagistic strands, is to halt the poet (and so the reader), in each case, at a particular stage of the journey. A dual effect is thus created, of the river's continuous flow (by the on-going cycle) and of a series of stages or scenes alongside its banks (by the individual sonnet). Because the sequence presents the philosophical problems of man's mortality and of mutability, it is much more than a narrative account of the river's progress or man's journey through life. Wordsworth contemplates these issues, pausing, as it were, to do so, and the use of sonnet serves to check the pace of the verse to which the movement of the river is giving impetus, to allow for meditation and discursiveness within the narrative. This the sonnet achieves partly by the nature of its form. It is a poem complete in itself, and it usually possesses a doubleness, with the second part of the poem returning to or resolving the first. The onward movement of Wordsworth's narrative may thus be directed backwards (or inwards) for a space in which the poet argues, considers, moralizes or draws conclusions.

Not every sonnet behaves in this way. Occasionally Wordsworth will dwell on or describe an aspect of the Duddon's scenery or progress in a single sonnet without contemplating, or coming to any conclusion about, the sonnet matter. But this is rare and probably the only sonnet in the series that is purely descriptive is no.VI, "Flowers".¹⁴ Generally a doubleness, even when two positions are not obviously present, is there, and, in most cases, there is a consummation of the thought. In the light of this, some of the existent criticism of these poems needs to be modified. As early as 1874, Charles Tomlinson wrote of the Duddon sonnets:

...[T]here is no clear distinction between the quatrains and the tercets, which often run into each other; and the tercets are frequently used, not for the sake of drawing a conclusion from the matter laid down in the quatrains, but merely for

¹⁴PWO, III, 248.

carrying on the description of some spot, or feature of a spot with which the sonnet opened. Hence these sonnets do not in many cases bear to be dissociated from their fellows, because it may happen that if one be taken out and presented as a specimen of an English sonnet, it would be unintelligible for want of context. Hence I cannot help thinking it was unfortunate that Wordsworth should have selected this form for a continuous narrative or connected series. A sonnet ought to be a complete organic structure, capable of being separated and admired for itself, without reference to its position in a collection. ¹⁵

Tomlinson's objection to these sonnets (and to Wordsworth's sonnets in general) is based partly on the belief of his time that a sonnet ought to adhere strictly to its classical divisions in order to qualify as true sonnet. Although few but the purists would consider this to be the case today, modern criticism continues to regard the Duddon sonnets as unequal to their occasions. Johnson, for example, considers the poems unsatisfactory for different reasons:

...[T]he individual sonnets and their occasions lack the complexity and depth needed to relate to their enveloping theme. With few exceptions, the topographical descriptions get bogged down in the narrative of companionship between man and stream....The desire for sequential unity prevents the individual sonnets from fully developing their occasions and renders their preoccupied descriptions somewhat superfluous. Only the "After-Thought" is completely to the point, transforming description and the narrative of companionship into his thematic purpose with the incisiveness reserved to a complex sonnet which serves solely its own occasion. ¹⁶

The "After-Thought" has long been considered the best sonnet of the collection and, in many cases, the only outstanding one, just as it is generally thought that in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, "Mutability" and "Inside of King's College Chapel, Cambridge" are the best of the three-part series. In each sequence these sonnets provide high spots, but they seem to blind readers to many other fine examples that are to be found elsewhere. Johnson himself, in concluding his chapter on the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, admits that there may be some sonnets which, gaining from the context of the great individual poems like "Mutability",

¹⁵ Charles Tomlinson, The Sonnet: Its Origin, Structure and Place in Poetry (London: Murray, 1874), p.77.

¹⁶ Johnson, pp.37-38.

"may then surprise us by revealing their own intrinsic merit".¹⁷ This is indeed the case, and I would go further and add that a number of the sonnets (although naturally benefitting from the context of the sequence) are individually of merit, even without the interest that "Mutability" and its peers promote in them.

Much the same observation can be made in connection with the Duddon series. While the "After-Thought" is undoubtedly the crowning point of the cycle in terms of both its individual merit and its position in the sequence, most of the other thirty-three sonnets are poems of a higher quality than has generally been recognised, and deserve to be evoked as more than mere background or context for the concluding sonnet. Some are without the profundity and density of Wordsworth's best, yet they seem to have the right substance for the occasion. What is ignored, when labelling these sonnets diffuse or rambling, is that not all of them are required to reflect moments or stages of optimum intensity but that they present, instead, the level or density that is appropriate to the development of the sequence at that particular point. The series is a highly unified poem and the integration is achieved by a balancing, not only of the parts within each sonnet, but also of the parts within the cycle. Stewart C. Wilcox, in his article on the symbolism and ideas in these sonnets, does justice to the poems as successful single entities. While advocating that most are less noble than the best of the occasional sonnets composed before 1806, he considers that "their level is consistently high, part of their attractiveness being a sometimes bleak austerity".¹⁸ Johnson's contention that the topographical descriptions become bogged down in the narrative of companionship between the poet and the Duddon seems not to take into account the intricate and symbolic fusion of the poet's mind and imagination with the force of the river. A brief comment on this series made by Geoffrey H. Hartman expresses the nature of such a synthesis: "The whole series... participates in the poet's desire to bind together the powers of his mind and of nature; and to know this illumines the character of his

¹⁷ Johnson, p.170.

¹⁸ Stewart C. Wilcox, "Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets", PMLA, 69 (1954), 131.

final sonnet."¹⁹ Rather than interfering with the descriptions of the local scene, the narrative proceeds to their accompaniment or, more accurately, it is developed through these descriptions. In fact, the completed cycle emerges as a possible illustration of what Wordsworth meant by the mind of man being "wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion".²⁰ Here, in the presence of the Duddon, the poet's voice can be heard proclaiming once more

How exquisitely the individual Mind
 (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
 Of the whole species) to the External World
 Is fitted...²¹

The River Duddon is given sequential unity by a number of organizing principles. In addition to the narrative and the images of the river which run through and link the sonnets, a time scheme helps to bind the cycle and to lend symbolic meaning to the resolution of the sequence. The poet's journey starts at dawn and ends at dusk. (Significantly, night and its attendant darkness do not enter the poem which, although elegiac in a sense, is essentially the manifestation of a vision that encompasses the promise of eternity, even while it casts a backward lingering glance at the earthly paradise which the poet experienced in the companionship of the Duddon.) The cycle of one day is traced by the poems, symbolising, through the personification of the river, the cycle of man's life as well. The river has its birth-place in the mountains from where, as a "cradled nursling" and a "child of the clouds", it leaves, to pass through all the stages of growth until it advances

Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
 And soul, to mingle with Eternity!²²

This linear movement of time is complicated, on a number of occasions, by the poet's looking backwards, to speculate about and meditate on

¹⁹Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814 (1964; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971), p.335.

²⁰PWO, V, 4, "Preface to the 1814 Edition of The Excursion", ll.53-54 of the "Prospectus".

²¹PWO, V, 5, "Preface to the 1814 Edition of The Excursion", ll.63-66 of the "Prospectus".

²²PWO, III, 260, sonnet XXXIII, "Conclusion".

the historical past (from before the time of primitive man to his own recent past) as it has evolved in this particular spot in England. References, for example, to the occupation of England by the Danes and the Romans, and to ancient Druidical rites, specify the account as the history of the English nation. But the issues of time and mutability that are contemplated have universal implications, and the occasional apparent intrusion into the narrative of foreign parts and ancient peoples such as the river Oroonoko (i.e., Orinoco) and the Indians in America, widens the focus of the narrative fleetingly to include the history of all mankind. (Wordsworth's own experience, while in the foreground of the poem, is yet, in the final analysis, subordinate to the wider objective considerations about mankind as the "After-Thought" ultimately reveals in the masterly transition there from the singular pronoun "I" to the plural "we".) These returns to the past have the effect of telescoping time, as it were, in much the same way that Wordsworth manages to suggest, in his poems employing memory, a double consciousness - of the present and the past.²³ The frequent juxtaposition of the poet on the banks of the stream and the river dwellers of the past beside ancient Duddon is like the shuttling back and forth in time that is a feature of the memory poems. This characteristic organizational principle (which Carlos Baker has called the "double-exposure technique")²⁴ is subtly used here, in a modified form, against the background of the river's perpetual flow, to suggest both the vast ages of time that the Duddon has been a witness to and the brief duration of man's life.

And then, lastly, there is the circular movement of eternal time that the river's recyclic course, from sky to sea, represents. The Duddon completes a mystical circle, beginning in the region of the Heavens as a "child of the clouds" (II) and ending in the ocean, "to mingle with Eternity" (XXXIII), a circle that contrasts with the linear progression

²³See Ch. II, pp.67-68 of this thesis.

²⁴Carlos Baker, ed., William Wordsworth's "The Prelude" with a Selection from the Shorter Poems, the Sonnets, "The Recluse", and "The Excursion", and Three Essays on "the Art of Poetry" (New York: Holt, 1948), p.xvii.

of man that ends with death.²⁵ But, at the same time, the river is a "partner" and a "guide", journeying with the poet and steering him towards an understanding of the nature of man's existence after death. The bond that is formed between the river and the poet is a uniting of the powers of the poet's mind with those of nature and, although man's form and function do not remain as the river's do, he learns through the union, through "love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower" that he is greater than he knows himself to be in his existence on earth.

Writers of sequences before Wordsworth were, on the whole, concerned less with the design of the cycle than with the individual poem as a perfected artifact. In The River Duddon, the single sonnets occupy their proper positions in the cycle and, because of the patterns of image and theme, could hardly be moved elsewhere without destroying the unity and accumulative meaning of the poem. A sequence like Donne's La Corona (wherein the last line of each sonnet is repeated as the first line of the next, and the units are very closely linked in both theme and rhyme) is an exception; in most cases, the focus is on the individual sonnet and the design of the larger group is incidental. In many of the Elizabethan and Italian sequences the broad theme of love groups the poems which, in Frost's terms, are held apart in their places, as the stars are, rather than occupying positions which are part of a progression of theme or narrative. A number of the sonnets reflect the many facets of the poet's theme but, generally speaking, if some of them were to be taken from their places in the cycle and put elsewhere, the thematic development, the unity of the series and the implied narrative would not necessarily be destroyed. This is not strictly true of sequences such as those of Sydney and Spenser where the dramatic impact of the first and the narrative and time scheme of the second would be disturbed by a re-ordering of the poems. But Shakespeare's Sonnets is a case in point: the contentious issue of the arrangement of the poems (for which Shakespeare was probably not responsible) illustrates that the final meaning of the sequence does not hinge upon the design as it

²⁵ In this sequence, as in others, Wordsworth gives some sonnets titles, and some not. If untitled (and for subsequent references) the poem is referred to by its number only.

is mirrored in the order of the sonnets or in an external framework. The movement of the poet through his theme is thus not a strictly mapped progress, as it is in the Duddon series. Rather, it is designed on the principle of the poem with an unstated centre to which each individual part leads. Wordsworth's organization, in which order matters, represents a somewhat new and different approach to the design *compared to* that of the Renaissance love sequence, and is characteristic of the poet to whom a "pervading sense of intense Unity" is so important.

The aspect of the Duddon sonnet cycle which at first might appear to be the most innovative - the poet's celebration of a river - in fact owes much of its mode of address and some of its genre scenes to the earlier Italian and English sonnets. The poem is addressed to the Duddon, as to a beloved, and the poet's love for its beauty, worth and moral guidance lead him to a contemplation of its spiritual meaning and of the eternal world. The river, the source of mystic contemplation, is a far cry from the woman who is at the centre of the Petrarchan tradition, but the manner in which the Duddon is from time to time approached and addressed is indebted to some of the conventions of the former mode. At the beginning of the cycle, the Duddon is compared to other celebrated natural scenes (classical springs and fountains, and awe-inspiring torrents) for whom the poet has no envy (I); the poet is temporarily at a loss to do justice to the features of the river (III); he expresses the hope that his verse will immortalize the object of his love (III); the theme of absence or of a parting is referred to (XXX); the Duddon spurns the company of others and is praised by the poet as superior to himself (XIV); Petrarchan love conceits are redirected to distinguish the poet's love from that of earlier sonneteers (VII); and a love sonnet (to his wife) is clearly indebted, in its phrasing and rhetorical figures, to those early sonnets (XXV). All these and more establish The River Duddon as part of a tradition. But, like Shakespeare, Wordsworth uses the conventions in different ways and remodels them to suit his own needs. By transferring the central feature of the poems from the sphere of human interest to the natural scene, he gives different emphases to the conventional sonnet matter and revitalizes the genre.

In 1820, a reviewer in the British Review, and London Critical Journal observed that Wordsworth's River Duddon belongs to the main

stream of topographical poetry. Robert Arnold Aubin, who points this out, himself considers the sequence to be the greatest of the river-poems,²⁶ one of the nine categories into which he divides that poetry which is aimed principally at "describing specifically named actual localities."²⁷ The River Duddon is the celebration of an actual river in the Lake District, and it is a blend of natural description and philosophical contemplation, in the tradition of the genre, to which Samuel Johnson first put a name in a review in 1799 on Cooper's Hill:

Cooper's Hill is the work that confers upon him [Denham] the rank and dignity of an original author. He seems to have been, at least among us, the author of a species of composition that may be denominated local poetry, of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection, or incidental meditation.²⁸

Aubin's survey of topographical poetry in England in the eighteenth century, and of the antecedents of the genre, includes poems that are not local as well as those in which the didactic purpose, far from being incidental, is the primary object of the poem. He states that the genre "in almost all of its manifestations teaches facts about the definite scenes of which it treats and is so far intrinsically didactic".²⁹ It was Denham who established the popularity of the local poem, or prospect piece, which became a favourite eighteenth century genre, practised by a great number of poets including Thomson, Pope, Gray and Dyer. Denham's poem, it is well-known, celebrates the Thames, Cooper's Hill being on the south bank of the river, facing Runnymede, and is therefore a poem about a river as well as about a hill.

The influence on Wordsworth in The River Duddon is not however limited to Augustan topographical river poems. There is to be found, in the work of pre-eighteenth century poets such as Drayton, Spenser and Milton, the "Catalogue of Rivers" passage which, although Wordsworth does not use it, he would have been familiar with through the influence that

²⁶ Robert Arnold Aubin, Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England, MLA Revolving Fund Series, No.6 (1936; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1966), pp.241-42.

²⁷ Aubin, p.vii.

²⁸ Aubin, p.39.

²⁹ Aubin, p.39.

the work of these three English poets had on him. Drayton's Poly-Olbion, in which the poet's Muse is seen to follow the chief rivers through England on her journey from the Channel Islands to the remote North,³⁰ had a considerable influence on the eighteenth century topographical poem, and the catalogue of rivers in this work is imitated by Milton in his own catalogue at the conclusion of "At a Vacation Exercise in the College, part Latin, part English".³¹ In Spenser, too, the habit of personifying a river is clear, and the catalogues of famous rivers of the earth in The Faerie Queene (IV.xi.20-47), and of Irish rivers in "Colin Clouts Come Home Again" (ll.108-155)³² and "The Mutability Cantos" (VI.40),³³ are well known. The "Prothalamion" is set on and by the Thames whose banks "paynted all with variable flowers" (l.13) remind one of those of the River Duddon where "sundry flowers" grow among the hawthorn and trees ("Flowers", VI).³⁴ "Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song" is the refrain of Spenser's poem, one of the most famous river poems in English. In both Drayton and Spenser, the celebration of rivers is part of their celebration of England and of their pride in the country - poetic ideals which, one feels, probably contributed to the creation of the Duddon poems in some respects.

The georgic and pastoral influences are some of the most considerable which meet in the topographical poem. The central theme of the georgic - the panegyric of labour and rural life - and various typical georgic items find their way into many scenes presented in the landscape poems of the eighteenth century. The poet usually indicates the nature of the scenery surrounding his chosen subject, traces short histories of the people concerned with the area, describes old or important buildings

³⁰ Aubin, p.20.

³¹ The Poems of John Milton, p.80.

³² Spenser's Minor Poems, ed. Ernest de Sélencourt (sic), Corr. ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp.312-13.

³³ The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser in Three Volumes: Spenser's Faerie Queene, Books IV-VII, ed. J.C. Smith, II (1909; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p.464.

³⁴ Spenser's Minor Poems, pp.474-79.

that grace the scene, digresses to reflect on local myths or lore, and moralizes or contemplates philosophical issues.³⁵ We are reminded that Wordsworth is writing within a time-honoured convention in The River Duddon which keeps alive a number of these georgic elements, the chief of these appearing as the sheep-washing scene ("Sheep-Washing", XXIII), ruin piece celebrating a ruin probably at the head of Holehouse Ghyll (XXVII), invented local myth of a love-lorn maid changed to a flower ("Tradition", XXII) and short history of the Reverend Robert Walker, a Seathwaite curate ("Seathwaite Chapel", XVIII).

According to Rose Marie Thale, the eighteenth century georgic was organized by a "formal statement of the theme and occasional recapitulation, but no particular verse form was necessary, nor any particular ordering of the parts". She adds that "all that was needed to make a georgic topographical was its description of a place".³⁶ John Chalker informs us that it is "by its nature an expansive rather than an intensive poem".³⁷ Wordsworth's river-poem is organized in the form of a sonnet sequence, a move which, in so far as it applies restraint, can be seen as characteristic of the poet who, in writing a topographical poem, may have felt the "weight of too much liberty".

Underlying the topographical poem is the idea of pastoral. A present Golden Age is celebrated and, in many cases, given a local mythology whose classical counterpart is Arcadia. The traditional pastoral themes such as man's relationship with nature, the ideal world of unfallen man, leisure and work, retreat and the good life, time, timelessness, love and death, find their way into these Augustan poems as some of them do later into The River Duddon. One feels, in the latter poem, that Wordsworth is conscious of inheriting, along with the genre of the topographical poem, the influence of traditional pastoral. He generally chooses to write about his kind of paradise, the Lake District, preferring native and realistic pastoral to the traditional

³⁵ See Rose Marie Thale, "Crabbe's Village and Topographical Poetry", JEGP, 55 (1956), p.620; Princeton Encyclopedia, p.311.

³⁶ Thale, p.620.

³⁷ John Chalker, The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form (London: Routledge, 1969), p.64.

mode established by Theocritus's Idylls and Virgil's Eclogues.³⁸ But, in the Duddon sequence, the episode in sonnet X, "The Same Subject", involving the shepherd and his shepherd-lass, suggests that on this occasion Wordsworth is returning to the ancient models via the eighteenth century. The pair crossing the stream form a charming and idealized rustic scene such as is to be found in traditional pastoral and such as is normally at variance with the poet's idea of realistic country life.³⁹

The River Duddon is thus based on regular and classical plans, those of the sonnet sequence and topographical poem. That the cycle is an eminently pleasing one seems to be due, in part anyway, to the successful marriage of the two genres. The landscape poem which presents its subject through a succession of passages describing scenes or stories related to the scenes, each a unit in itself, is a loosely organized poem; the sequence, which strives for the effect of individual scenes or episodes in poems that can stand on their own, is tightly organized, particularly as it is constructed in The River Duddon.

In an introductory note to the sequence, Wordsworth explains that he had unwittingly trespassed upon Coleridge's ground in writing a rural poem in which a stream gives unity to the work.⁴⁰ About twenty years before the Duddon series was published, Coleridge had spoken to Wordsworth of his intention to write such a poem, to be entitled "The Brook", but, as so often happened to one of Coleridge's ideas, it failed to become anything more than an intention, the outline of which is given in Chapter X of the Biographia Literaria. Coleridge describes the situation thus:

I sought for a subject that should give equal room and freedom for description, incident and impassioned reflections on men, nature and society, yet supply in itself a natural connection to the parts, and unity to the whole. Such a subject I conceived myself to have found in a stream, traced from its source in the hills among the yellow-red moss and conical glass-shaped tufts of bent,

³⁸ See Prelude (Maxwell), p.305-09, VIII, ll.98-172.

³⁹ PWO, III, 250.

⁴⁰ PWO, III, 503.

to the first break or fall, where its drops became audible, and it begins to form a channel; thence to the peat and turf barn, itself built of the same dark squares as it sheltered; to the sheepfold; to the first cultivated plot of ground; to the lonely cottage and its bleak garden won from the heath; to the hamlet, the villages, the market-town, the manufactories and the sea-port.⁴¹

It is quite possible that Coleridge's plan, which bears some similarity of outline to Wordsworth's, helped to shape the idea that finally crystallized in The River Duddon, and that Wordsworth was indebted to his friend in so far that they had together discussed the future of "The Brook". But Coleridge's idea is not an original one, as Aubin's bibliography makes clear;⁴² the river-poem forms a substantial part of topographical poetry, either as a poem in which the river dominates and is metaphorical as well as literal, or as one in which it is part of the landscape description. Karl Kroeber has pointed out that the famous lines from Denham's poem (189-92) could well summarize Wordsworth's poetic ideal in The River Duddon:

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme!
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o'er-flowing full.

Wordsworth, says Kroeber, "sees the river as an active principle inter-connecting features that otherwise would be but the abstract contraries of the Renaissance square of oppositions, moist-dry, fire-water, etc".⁴³ In much the same way, Coleridge envisaged his stream as an integrating force in his projected poem, "The Brook". But any real encroachment upon his friend's right Wordsworth considered himself to be innocent of. In the introductory note he points out that Coleridge had had a "general" subject in mind whereas his is "particular", and that the restrictions which the sonnet form placed upon him, "narrowing unavoidably the range of thought", further precluded the possibility of his work bearing any resemblance to the type of poem that Coleridge had had

⁴¹ Biographia Literaria, p.108.

⁴² Aubin, pp.377-85.

⁴³ Karl Kroeber, Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth (Madison: Wisconsin Univ. Press, 1975), p.93.

In no. XXI of The River Duddon, the associations of the river awaken the poet's memory of departed companions who, characteristically, become real and immediate for the poet whose recollections are so vivid that he feels himself to be a "double-consciousness" when they are conjured up before him:

Whence that low voice?—A whisper from the heart,
 That told of days long past, when here I roved
 With friends and kindred tenderly beloved;
 Some who had early mandates to depart, 4
 Yet are allowed to steal my path athwart
 By Duddon's side; once more do we unite,
 Once more beneath the kind Earth's tranquil light;
 And smothered joys into new being start. 8
 From her unworthy seat, the cloudy stall
 Of Time, breaks forth triumphant Memory;
 Her glistening tresses bound, yet light and free
 As golden locks of birch, that rise and fall 12
 On gales that breathe too gently to recal
 Aught of the fading year's inclemency! 47

In Wordsworth's poem, memory triumphs over Time, even though the latter is only temporarily suspended, reviving old joys that free the poet from the laws of historic time. In spite of the suggestion in the final line that the poet is moving on towards the autumn of his life, the experience in this poem is essentially an inspiring one, whereas Bowles's reunion with the Itchin, comforting though it is to be in the presence of the river again, reminds him of happier days and increases his sense of loss.

Wordsworth, one feels, would have come to write a long poem which celebrates a river whether the seed had been planted in his mind by Coleridge or not, and whether poems on the same subject had been written before him or not. Since birth, rivers were of especial significance to the poet who had lived alongside one (the Derwent), who had loved it from boyhood, and whose poetry abounds with references to actual rivers, water imagery and epiphanic moments inspired by moving waters. The River Derwent is the first of the features of his beloved vale to be celebrated in The Prelude, and the first to awaken his love for and to teach him about Nature. That "fairest of all rivers" he tells us "loved / To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song", and, when he was a child, it made

⁴⁷ PWO, III, 255.

ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
 To more than infant softness, giving me
 Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
 A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
 That nature breathes among the hills and groves.⁴⁸

An experience in Switzerland, described in The Prelude (VI, 592-616), stands out as one of the most significant of Wordsworth's encounters with rivers, particularly as it prefigures, in some ways, the poet's later journey along the banks of the Duddon. After discovering that he and Robert Jones had crossed the Alps (an event which Wordsworth later realized had given rise to one of those spots of time in which the nature of the imagination was revealed), the poet returned to the Alpine river which they had been pursuing, and continued along its course, remarking upon the following:

The brook and road
 Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy strait,
 And with them did we journey several hours
 At a slow pace. The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And in the narrow rent at every turn
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.⁴⁹

Further on (ll.731-53), Wordsworth says that he (and Jones) responded to more than mere externals of the scene as they resumed their journey after crossing the Alps. Later, the poet recognized that his experience of events such as these - crossing the Alps and following a river - fell into archetypal forms. These he celebrates and interprets in his poetry. In recognizing that these truths lie about us in Nature and meet us as we live, Wordsworth is bearing witness to the vital interdependence of

⁴⁸ Prelude (Maxwell), pp.49-51, I, ll.269-81.

⁴⁹ Prelude (Maxwell), pp.239-41, VI, ll.621-40.

man and Nature, by which man can be led to see the meaning of his existence in this universe. Imagination, kindled by such experience, sheds its light on the scene. Rivers, literal and metaphorical, are frequently the material from which he shapes vehicles for the tenors of his pilgrimages through life and, as the Alpine crossing prefigures the Snowdon incident, so this journey foreshadows the later one along the Duddon. After lodging for the night at a "dreary mansion" in a valley, the travellers continued their walk,

Led by the stream, ere noon-day magnified
 Into a lordly river, broad and deep,
 Dimpling along in silent majesty,
 With mountains for its neighbours, and in view
 Of distant mountains and their snowy tops,
 And thus proceeding to Locarno's Lake,
 Fit resting-place for such a visitant.⁵⁰

Thus the course of the stream in the Alps (the River Tusa)⁵¹ has been traced, if not from its source, for some way, before it enters Lake Locarno. This last stage of its life is echoed in the description of the Duddon's approach to a resting place as the river expands,

Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands
 Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!
 Beneath an ampler sky a region wide
 Is opened round him; —hamlets, towers, and towns,
 And blue-topped hills, behold him from afar;⁵²

until the Duddon advances

Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
 And soul, to mingle with Eternity!⁵³

Wordsworth seems to have found the Duddon an appropriate subject for his sequence for a number of reasons, some of which can be deduced from the account he gives us of his associations with the river, both as a boy and in later years. But the chief of these would seem to be related to the character of the stream itself. An obscure brook in Cumberland,

⁵⁰ Prelude (Maxwell), p.241, VI, ll.650-56.

⁵¹ William Wordsworth: The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (London: Norton, 1979), p.220. A note to l.8 specifies the river as the Tusa.

⁵² PWO, III, 260, sonnet XXXII, ll.7-11.

⁵³ PWO, III, 260, sonnet XXXIII, ll.13-14.

its remoteness is responsible for its inviolate state which Wordsworth is careful to establish from the beginning of the series. In the first sonnet he announces that a native stream is to be the subject of his verse which, to be worthy of its topic, must be "pure, vigorous, free, and bright". The river's purity when it issues forth, a

Child of the clouds! remote from every taint
Of sordid industry... ⁵⁴

is its distinguishing characteristic, not only at the source where it is encompassed by a "gleam / Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare" (III) or as it leaves its birthplace robed "instantly in garb of snow-white foam" (IV), but also once it has reached civilization. Here, the sheep are washed in a smooth and clear pool and, for the moment, the Duddon's "spotless flood" is dirtied. The poet tells us, however, that no harm is done as "the stains are fugitive" and cannot sully the pure waters of the pastoral river (XXIII). A virgin stream, it is an appropriate emblem for man who through love, hope and faith is ennobled; and for Nature, as it is now and as it has always been from "Thousands of years before the silent air / Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen" (II).

The Duddon's isolation and position of solitude is likewise emphasized in the beginning where we learn that the only poet to have sung its praises is the "whistling Blast" and that Desolation, its patron saint, guards the river and its environment (II). What is important is that man has not desecrated the Duddon in any way but, as we see throughout the series, lives in harmony with his environment. When man and his dwellings do appear, they are few, and seen to exist in relative solitude: the solitary farm, small white church, one small hamlet emphasize rather than interrupt the solitude that rules. George McLean Harper, one of Wordsworth's early biographers, writes that the sonnets are "[s]omewhat bare and austere...like the bleak hills and stony valleys they celebrate. They keep faith with their subjects, a self-sacrificing loyalty that scorns the specious gains of flattery. Few mountainous regions in old populated countries are so unblessed with legends as the English Lake district."⁵⁵ Wilcox follows Harper in maintaining that

⁵⁴PWO, III, 246, sonnet II, ll.1-2.

⁵⁵George McLean Harper, William Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influence (London: Murray, 1929), p.565.

"the comparative lack of legends and traditions concerning the Duddon seems suited to Wordsworth's tendency to seek truths in simple objects and common men. Like his own life the Duddon ran serenely. So he chose a river obscure in history..."⁵⁶ It has already been noted that Wilcox considers the sonnets to have a "sometimes bleak austerity".⁵⁷ The observations of both writers are of interest and possibly of some truth, but it should be noted that the Duddon's surroundings are not always stark. This I discovered while tracing part of the river's course by walking along it in June, 1981. It approaches Broughton-in-Furness, for example, from a height that is (at any rate, now) wooded and luxuriant, and it remains so until emerging from its bower of trees shortly before it reaches the town. Wordsworth himself tells us that it is surrounded, at times, by "social trees" (VI), and that moss and numerous kinds of flowers are to be found on the banks. But the fact that it is, for the most part, a solitary river and an unknown one contributes to its function as a tutor to man of truths that are free from the "World's vain objects".⁵⁸

The paradoxical nature of the river's existence is first established in the second sonnet where, although it is personified as a child at its source, it is seen to have flowed from the beginning of historical time:

Child of the clouds! remote from every taint
 Of sordid industry thy lot is cast;
 Thine are the honours of the lofty waste;
 Nor seldom, when with heat the valleys faint, 4
 Thy handmaid Frost with spangled tissue quaint
 Thy cradle decks; —to chant thy birth, thou hast
 No meaner Poet than the whistling Blast,
 And Desolation is thy Patron-saint! 8
 She guards thee, ruthless Power! who would not spare
 Those mighty forests, once the bison's screen,
 Where stalked the huge deer to his shaggy lair
 Through paths and alleys roofed with darkest green; 12
 Thousands of years before the silent air
 Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen!

In the octave the Duddon is personified as a child of the present who has Nature for its nurse and solitude for its companion. The sestet

⁵⁶Wilcox, p.135.

⁵⁷See p.95 above.

⁵⁸See Ch. II, pp.72-73 of this thesis.

presents the river as a symbol of antiquity rather than as a personified figure such as it is in the octave. The nature of the river's historical past, here and elsewhere, establishes it as an ancient and permanent form, alongside which man's life is seen to be brief and temporal. Giving point to this brevity is the time-span of the poet's journey along the Duddon's banks which begins at dawn and ends just before sunset: man's life is no more than a day. But the progress of the river parallels that of man, from birth, to maturity, to death. Wordsworth believes that Nature presents us with truths about ourselves, in an almost concrete form on occasion, and that we find in Nature laws and rhythms which are paralleled in our lives. The river is such a form. Hence, it is both more of a literal image and therefore more of a symbolic one than it might be for another poet, such as, for instance, Denham who in Cooper's Hill invokes the Thames as an inspiration for his poetry (and perhaps for his life). Wordsworth uses an archetypal image (the river of life) conscious that it is an archetype. The progress of the River Duddon is thus the metaphorical vehicle for the tenor of an individual human life. As the series unfolds and the process of the metaphorical assimilation of man's mind with the powers of the river becomes more complete, Wordsworth's conclusion, that the human consciousness will continue into eternity even as the river enters the Deep, seems justifiable. The idea (which the poet has momentarily entertained) that it "ends" in the sea is mistaken, as we can see when we look back along its course ("The Form remains, the Function never dies").⁵⁹ This is the literal immortality of the river; as long as the universe as we know it exists, the river-type will exist. As both Johnson and Harper have remarked, Wordsworth attempts to create an identification, as complete as possible, of the powers of the mind with those of the river.⁶⁰ Johnson sees this as reflected in the changing images to which the Duddon is compared:

The Duddon may be thought of starting as a simple, concrete noun that successively picks up modifiers along its course which are ever more abstract and symbolic. In this manner, Wordsworth attempts to interlink the stream's physical and metaphysical characteristics. His object is to assimilate those characteristics into his consciousness and endow the

⁵⁹ PWO, III, 261, sonnet XXXIV, "After-Thought", l.6.

⁶⁰ Johnson, p.123; Hartman, p.335.

stream with others as completely as possible to create an identification between the river and human life. If he succeeds, he can hope that just as the river superficially "dies" when it enters the sea but retains its basic nature, so human consciousness, when the body dies, will continue into eternity...By the end of the sequence, the stream is fully developed as a symbol of human life. Its termination in the sea in sonnet XXXVIII, "Conclusion", mirrors the Christian hope of dying into eternity.⁶¹

Although Wordsworth nowhere in the sequence says exactly what he understands about eternity, he seems to be subscribing to Christian ideas about life, death, and immortality. An orthodox belief, which becomes more explicit in the 1820 Memorials, and is at the centre of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, is implied in the dedicatory poem and in certain of the sonnets. But the poet does not mean the promise of infinity to take the distinct shape of a Christian eternity in this poem. This is not due to a vagueness of thought, nor does it call for "some suspension of critical power" as Geoffrey Durrant would have it does.⁶² It is, rather, an insistence on the deep mysteries of Nature and human life which is consistent with Wordsworth's poetic thought as expressed in many of his poems.

Sonnets II-V depict the stream in the stages of childhood. It leaves its birthplace, a "cradled Nursling of the mountain" (IV), to begin its exuberant journey, snakelike, "Thridding with sinuous lapse the rushes, through / Dwarf willows gliding, and by ferny brake". From there the "undaunted Rill" leaves the heights,

Robed instantly in garb of snow-white foam;
And laughing dares the Adventurer, who hath clomb
So high, a rival purpose to fulfil;

In this sonnet and the next, where a single cottage comes into view and the young children "by the mother's eyes / Carelessly watched, sport through the summer day", playmates of the stream, time is unheeded, for:

light as endless May
On infant bosoms lonely Nature lies.

But the carefree phase of childhood has to pass and social influences introduce a growing awareness of permanence and process. The word

⁶¹Johnson, pp.123 and 132.

⁶²Geoffrey Durrant, Wordsworth and the Great System: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetic Universe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), p.80.

"social" in the line "Ere yet our course was graced with social trees" (VI) would seem to suggest more than "growing in a company" in this sonnet which is a transition from the relative solitude which the children enjoy in the previous sonnet to the presence of lovers in the following poem which describes the less natural state of courtship. Sonnet VI, "Flowers", celebrates the sense of awakening beauty, the natural state of the flora contrasting with the artificiality of the rose of Petrarchan conceits in no.VII. Subtly, a return to a literary past leads the poet to question the nature of primitive man in no.VIII. His questions, however, receive no answer. Air and earth are silent and the stream itself murmurs only that its function has always been a restorative one, yielding such influence as the poet hopes his poem on the Duddon will have. That this is one of the primary aims of the sequence is made clear in the dedication to the Rev. Dr. Wordsworth which heads the Duddon sonnets and other poems published in the collection in 1820:

Yes, they can make, who fail to find,
 Short leisure even in busiest days;
 Moments, to cast a look behind,
 And profit by those kindly rays 70
 That through the clouds do sometimes steal,
 And all the far-off past reveal.

Hence, while the imperial City's din
 Beats frequent on thy satiate ear,
 A pleased attention I may win 75
 To agitations less severe,
 That neither overwhelm nor cloy,
 But fill the hollow vale with joy! 63

References to the past, such as these and others throughout the series, are deftly interwoven with the descriptions of the stream and its landscapes, as are man's associations with the Duddon, and the poet's allusions to old pagan forms of worship as well as to the Christian church. As Mary Moorman has observed, "It [the series] is a tapestry into which are woven not merely pictures of the ever-changing landscape but indications of Wordsworth's own deep consciousness of the historic and pre-historic past of man...."⁶⁴

⁶³ PWO, III, 245.

⁶⁴ Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth: A Biography. The Later Years, 1803-1850 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p.376; hereafter cited as Moorman, LY.

Once the stream grows into a mature brook "of loud and stately march" (IX, "The Stepping-Stones"), signs of human habitation become more frequent, and Nature and man are seen to live together in harmony. Bridges of stone and plank span the river in IX; a village lies sheltered beneath a green hill ("Open Prospect", XIII); Seathwaite Chapel comes into view and is the occasion for a eulogy of the Rev. Robert Walker "whose good works formed an endless retinue" (XVIII); the wave-washed Kirk of Ulpha surrounded by pastoral graves blends with its river environment (XXXI). The progress of the river from youth to maturity registers the first warning in the series that man's existence is fleeting. Sonnet IX concludes with a delayed sestet which has the effect of condensing the time span of man's life, emphasizing its brevity:

Here the Child
 Puts, when the high-swoln Flood runs fierce and wild,
 His budding courage to the proof; and here
 Declining Manhood learns to note the sly
 And sure encroachment of infirmity,
 Thinking how fast time runs, life's end how near!

This is followed by a sonnet entitled "The Same Subject" (X) which enlaces the love interests of man with the other social concerns that are beginning to operate. The Youth and his Shepherd-lass, victorious in their love, are careless of time's hand. But the next two sonnets, "The Faery Chasm" (XI) and "Hints for the Fancy" (XII), are ironic reminders of the passing of all things. In the latter poem, material images start up, the Naiad dwellings in the river, "bright liquid mansions", enduring through the ages while

the solidities of mortal pride,
 Palace and tower, are crumbled into dust!—

Reflections on an antique age of superstitious beliefs (XI); on a statue in a niche of rock, the origins of which are uncertain (XV); on Indian cliff-carvings in America by the Oroonoko River ("American Tradition", XVI); and on a Roman fort and a Druidical circle which, Wordsworth tells us, is in the neighbourhood of the Duddon ("Return", XVII),⁶⁵ give way to a tribute to Seathwaite Chapel and its rector in XVIII. These returns to a pagan era which alternate with considerations

⁶⁵PWO, III, 508.

of a present Christian England stress the permanence of the river and the history of men.

Sonnets XIX, "Tributary Stream", and XX, "The Plain of Donnerdale", are devoted to the Duddon's progress, drawing a parallel with human marriage and celebrating the different moods of the river respectively. In "The Plain of Donnerdale", Wordsworth contends that the Duddon, in its tranquil state, would beautify Elysium itself. Furthermore, the allusion to Paradise Lost (VIII. 263) in line 4, "the liquid lapse serene", associates the Duddon with rivers in Eden, newly created earth whose sounds are among the first that the newly created Adam hears. Once the river leaves the plain, its course becomes rough, and it rushes onwards in an ecstasy of abandonment:

The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
 Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
 Thy waters, Duddon! 'mid these flowery plains;
 The still repose, the liquid lapse serene, 4
 Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
 Had beautified Elysium! But these chains
 Will soon be broken; — a rough course remains,
 Rough as the past; where Thou, of placid mien, 8
 Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
 And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
 Shalt change thy temper; and, with many a shock
 Given and received in mutual jeopardy, 12
 Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
 Tossing her frantic thyrsus wide and high! 66

The turn in the middle of line 6 is skilfully used to indicate the change in the river's mood. Introducing the second part of the poem, the word "But" warns us of the approaching turbulence in which both the poet and the river seem to delight, the uneven rhythms contrasting with the slow cadences of the first six lines, and the alternating rhymes of the final six lines contributing to an impression of the Duddon's release from its temporary confinement. One feels that it is the latter mood which shows the river to its best advantage or, rather, which Wordsworth responds to more keenly, a feeling which is possibly prompted by his inversion of the octave and the sestet in this poem. The first part of the sonnet (five and a half lines) resembles a curtailed sestet, and the second part (eight and a half lines), an extended octave. The resolution appears to

⁶⁶ PWO, III, 254.

lie with the argument of the "octave", with the tempestuous nature of the river which cannot seemingly be contained within the space of the customary sestet, rather than with the mood of the sestet's "still repose". The calm comes before the storm and not after it and the storm is the resolving force for the Duddon, and for the poet.

The sequence now returns to human problems; in sonnet XXI, Wordsworth recalls departed companions who explored the banks of the Duddon with him, and no. XXII, in which he relates the story of a "love-lorn maid", commemorated by the solitary primrose on its rock overlooking the pool, is a charming Cumbrian version of the Narcissus myth. From sonnet XXIV, "The Resting-Place", through to XXVIII, "Journey Renewed", the poet pauses to rest and meditate upon the stages of companionship between himself and streams. "Return, Content! for fondly I pursued" (XXVI), an early sonnet composed probably in 1803 or 1804, celebrates the poet's life-long association with streams, and XXX contrasts the severance of ties with virtue or friend, and its ill-effects, with the temporary separation of the journeying poet from the river and his assurance that they will meet again. This poem firmly establishes the poet's choice of Nature's company, symbolized by the river, as the guiding force in his life. In XXVIII, Wordsworth calls the Duddon "the Leader of my onward way", and in XXXIII, "Conclusion", the river is referred to as a "Wanderer". Both descriptions imply that the Duddon has become symbolic in its assimilation into the poet's mind. It emerges as a type of solitary, which, with the poet, has prepared itself for its meeting with eternity, "the sweets of earth contentedly resigned" (XXXIII). In this sonnet which concludes the body of the sequence and in ll. 12-14 of the previous poem, XXXII, the river is once more compared to another famous river, the Thames, returning the series to the first sonnet where Wordsworth states his preference of the River Duddon to other famous or enticing streams. The circular design that is suggestive of the regenerative nature of the River Duddon is thus completed. Poet and stream arrive at the end of their journey and the symbolic identification of the river with human life is complete:

But here no cannon thunders to the gale;
 Upon the wave no haughty pendants cast
 A crimson splendour: lowly is the mast
 That rises here, and humbly spread, the sail;
 While, less disturbed than in the narrow Vale

Through which with strange vicissitudes he passed,
 The Wanderer seeks that receptacle vast
 Where all his unambitious functions fail. 8
 And may thy Poet, cloud-born Stream! be free—
 The sweets of earth contentedly resigned,
 And each tumultuous working left behind
 At seemly distance—to advance like Thee; 12
 Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
 And soul, to mingle with Eternity! 67

The great "After-Thought", italicized by the poet to indicate its significance, subsumes all the central themes of the series and incorporates them into the final philosophic pronouncement of The River Duddon. Set apart from the body of the poem by virtue of its title and its italics, it casts a backward look up stream, or at the verse which builds up to it, and emerges as a kind of monument to the sequence:

I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
 As being past away. —Vain sympathies!
 For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
 I see what was, and is, and will abide; 4
 Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
 The Form remains, the Function never dies;
 While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
 We Men, who in our morn of youth defied 8
 The elements, must vanish; —be it so!
 Enough, if something from our hands have power
 To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
 And if, as toward the silent tomb we go, 12
 Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
 We feel that we are greater than we know. 68

This poem in effect summarizes the poetical meaning of the river's journey from source to ocean, and of man's journey through life. In the extended octave, the river's immortality is contrasted with the mortality of man: individual man must vanish while the form and function of the river remain. But, as the poet followed the course of the stream, he was persuaded that "we are greater than we know" by Nature, his "partner" and his "guide". The "sestet" presents the resolution, or possibly only the consolation, that man can serve the future by imaginative creation in the present and that he can escape the apparent bondage to time and change through love, through hope, and through faith. The river has emerged, as Arthur Beatty observes, as a symbol of "the ever-vanishing, yet ever

⁶⁷ PWO, III, 260.

⁶⁸ PWO, III, 261.

developing race of man".⁶⁹ The river which was for Wordsworth a foretoken of the "calm / That Nature breathes among the hills and groves"⁷⁰ has become a precursor of the values which both transcend and imbue with meaning a life of earthly pleasure. The poet moves beyond the view held in much of his earlier poetry that Paradise, found in the natural world, is all-sufficient. His vision is now of ultimate peace to be sought for in an eternity beyond "the silent tomb", a form of life which the eternal flow of the River Duddon has taught him exists. This sequence, however, with its emphasis on the beauty and moral guidance found in Nature as well as on an eternity beyond natural creation, embodies both visions, the early and the late; or, at least, it presents a compound of the two views. It is through a contemplation of one of the cycles of Nature that Wordsworth arrives at a sense of the eternal. The River Duddon is, in this sense, a watershed poem. In the 1820 Memorials and especially the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, this sense of infinity will take the distinct shape of a Christian eternity, and the river in the latter series will be a predominantly sacramental image, less a "partner" and a "guide" than a means of taking us on a journey through the life of the spirit.

II

Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820 is one of six groups of poems which commemorate Wordsworth's travels in Britain and Europe. The first, Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803, contains three sonnets out of seventeen poems, and the second, Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1814, consists of four poems, none of which is a sonnet. Of the thirty-eight poems in the 1820 Memorials, twenty are sonnets, these forming the larger part of the collection (although only just) for the first time. Thereafter, there is a greater use of the sonnet in the tour groups: twenty-three sonnets out of twenty-six poems in Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems; forty-five sonnets out of forty-eight poems in Poems Composed or Suggested During a Tour, in the Summer of 1833; and the Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837 contains twenty-three sonnets

⁶⁹ Arthur Beatty, William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations, 3rd. ed. (Madison: Wisconsin Univ. Press, 1960), p.222.

⁷⁰ Prelude (Maxwell), p.51, I. ll.280-81.

out of twenty-eight poems. On all of these occasions, the poet is writing within the tradition of eighteenth century topographical poetry and is seemingly familiar with the framework of the tour poem, but the combination of sonnet and lyric of other type is not an eighteenth century genre. It would seem that, in this respect, Wordsworth is remembering the Italian sonnet sequences which are interspersed with other lyric forms. Aubin, however, in his bibliography classifies five of Wordsworth's tour series as examples of the Journey poem, one of his categories of topographical poetry.⁷¹ Aubin cites Bowles's Fourteen Sonnets, Elegiac and Descriptive, Written during a Tour (1789) as responsible for an important development towards the end of the century of the "sentimental journey".⁷² Wordsworth knew and admired Bowles's sonnets whose influence on his own has been noted before.⁷³

Originally the 1820 Memorials were meant for Dorothy Wordsworth's Recollections of the tour on the Continent. In a letter to Catherine Clarkson (16 January, 1822), Dorothy tells her friend that Wordsworth began the series in November, 1821, by promising to write some poems for her journal but that "his work has grown to such importance (and has continued growing) that I have long ceased to consider it in connection with my own narrative". She adds that the poems are "as good as a descriptive tour - without describing".⁷⁴ The result of Wordsworth's undertaking was the series, Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820, published three months later, in March, 1822. Since it is generally considered[†] to be a collection of unimaginative poems, few in the series have received any approval or attention. Harper, for example, finds that many of the poems are "no improvement upon the prose narratives".⁷⁵ Mary Moorman regards them as "the least interesting series of poems Wordsworth ever wrote", attributing their dullness to his commitment at the time to the Ecclesiastical Sonnets which he had

⁷¹ Aubin, pp.385-94.

⁷² Aubin, p.253.

⁷³ See Ch. I, pp.40-42 of this thesis, and pp.105-06 above.

⁷⁴ LY, 1821-30, pp.62-63.

⁷⁵ Harper, p.568.

not yet completed when he began to compose the 1820 Memorials. She is of the opinion that the poems lack imaginative vitality, mentioning only an ode, "To Enterprise" (included in the first volume of the series), as worthy of distinction.⁷⁶ The only other poem in the sequence to have received much critical attention is no. XXXII, "Processions", with critics such as Hartman and Eugene Stelzig setting it apart as a poem distinguished by its imaginative imagery, and including it amongst Wordsworth's greatest poetry.⁷⁷ The poet himself singled out a poem in stanzas, "The Eclipse of the Sun, 1820" (XXVII), as the best of the collection, "to be valued I think as a specimen of description in which beauty majesty and novelty, nature and art, earth and heaven are brought together with a degree of lyrical spirit and movement which professed Odes have, in our language at least, rarely attained".⁷⁸

Yet, although the series is considered to rise only occasionally to heights of poetic expression, it is, in a number of ways, an interesting sequence. We may note first that the poems gain in strength from their context, that of a journey which encompasses both the past and the present and is, in this sense, spiritual as well as physical. A consideration of the group as a whole imparts to the individual poems a level of imaginative reading which derives from the themes and design of the series. The idea of an organic poem is created by the journey motif, if not by one experience arising out of another, or of one day yielding to the next, then of events and impressions presenting themselves to the poet as he proceeds on his journey, the chronological order of which is strictly observed by the poems.⁷⁹

Secondly, the series represents a turning point in Wordsworth's use of the sonnet in his tour poems. We may say that the early Descriptive Sketches (1790-92), a poem written in heroic couplets, is the first of these. The two tours to Scotland in 1803 and 1814 are recorded in sequences that contain only three sonnets between them.

⁷⁶Moorman, LY, p.402.

⁷⁷Hartman, pp.331-33; Eugene L. Stelzig, "Mutability, Ageing, and Permanence in Wordsworth's Later Poetry", SEL, 19 (1979), 640-41.

⁷⁸LY, 1821-30, p.65.

⁷⁹See LY, 1821-30, p.64, W.W. to Richard Sharp, April 16, 1822.

It is in this series of 1820 that the poet begins to find the sonnet a convenient form for his memorials, and in all of the later tours the sonnet form predominates. We know that Wordsworth used the form as much for domestic or humble subjects as he did for political or public themes, and there is, in most of the tour series, a happy combination. What is more, the tour sequence, while the poet no doubt meant it to be edifying, is nevertheless a diversion and undertaken for purposes of recreation, and it would seem to be suitable material for the form of which Wordsworth wrote:

In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
 Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
 Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
 Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
 Should find brief solace there, as I have found.⁸⁰

Then there is the matter of the speaker in these poems. Wordsworth started out by writing them as private memorials (for his sister's journal) and, although they finally formed a work for publication, the poet gives the impression that they are shared poems, as it were, and that they have been composed for a small group of friends rather than for mankind. The "Dedication" at the head of the collection makes it clear that the poet's fellow-travellers were uppermost in his mind when he wrote (or assembled) the poems, and an Isabella Fenwick note to the sonnet, "Between Namur and Liege" (VI), outlines Wordsworth's expressed reason for writing the series:

Details in the spirit of these sonnets are given both in Mrs. Wordsworth's Journals and my Sister's, and the re-perusal of them has strengthened a wish long entertained that somebody would put together, as in one work, the notices contained in them, omitting particulars that were written down merely to aid our memory, and bringing the whole into as small a compass as is consistent with the general interests belonging to the scenes, circumstances, and objects touched on by each writer.⁸¹

Seen in this light - as poems of an intimate nature - the series takes on tones that are fairly unusual in Wordsworth's poetry. We are aware of his travel-companions, Dorothy and Mary (and Henry Crabb Robinson, the

⁸⁰ PWO, III, 1-2, "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room", ll.10-14.

⁸¹ PWO, III, 469.

Monkhouses and Miss Horrocks for part of the way), as being with the poet for most of the time, and the speaker's voice is consequently a companionable one in a number of the poems. This could be said to be the case in every one of the tour poems, as Wordsworth was never without a companion when he travelled, but, in the other series, the poet does not appear to be as conscious of his fellow-travellers as he is in these 1820 Memorials. This assertion needs qualifying particularly in the matter of the 1803 Memorials which commemorates a walking tour in Scotland undertaken by Wordsworth and Dorothy. Here, as later, the poet drew on his sister's Journal for many of the details of the tour, and her presence and influence are part of the poems themselves. Yet, in this instance, Dorothy is more the spiritual companion that she frequently is in Wordsworth's poetry, more the audience than, for example, the family grouped about the fire-side to listen to the tale of "The Blind Highland Boy", which concludes the 1803 collection.⁸²

Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems is chiefly elegiac in tone, commemorating scenes which recall Sir Walter Scott from whose "threshold loved by every Muse" the tour began and the series took "impulse".⁸³ The later Memorials (1837) have as their occasions the poet's visits to various parts of Italy but their concerns are, in the main, religious, political and historical themes as they are inspired by the scenes before the poet. In both of these sequences (1803 and 1837), the presence of Wordsworth's companion seldom intrudes upon the poems which are, altogether, less concerned with the pleasure of travel than the 1820 Memorials. The journey in 1820 was undertaken by Wordsworth with the intention of returning to some of the places which he and Robert Jones had visited on their walking tour thirty years earlier, and showing these to his fellow-travellers. If we bear this in mind, together with the fact that the poems are based on writings from the journals of Dorothy and Mary (and a few composed at the instigation of Crabb Robinson), it is not surprising that the overall impression is one of a companionable and largely contented tone on the part of the poet.

⁸²PWO, III, 88-96.

⁸³PWO, III, 279-80, no.XXVI, "Apology", ll.20-21.

And lastly, from a reading of the poems in conjunction with Crabb Robinson's diary and reminiscences, Dorothy's Journal and the poet's own prose comments, we receive a vivid impression of Wordsworth away from home, his reactions to foreign places and people; and, above all, we learn something about his selection of incidents and occasions for his poetry. This last, as it is illustrated by the writings on the tour, is particularly interesting in that it confirms the poet's view, held all his life, that the subjects of his poetry are the better for being ordinary, and that the interest in a poem is provided by the feelings of the poet (and so of the reader too) and not by the subject alone. Wordsworth seems never to have departed from his aim to select ordinary situations for his poetry, an aim first presented to us in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Crabb Robinson, in his reminiscences of the 1820 tour, alludes to the poet's belief in this matter in connection with the death of Goddard, a young American whom the party had met in Lucerne and parted from at Mount Rigi:

We learned poor Goddard...perished on the lake of Zurich, on the third day after we took leave of them [Goddard and his companion, a Scot] on Mount Rigi...We were all deeply impressed by this event. Wordsworth, I knew, was not fond of drawing the subjects of his poems from occurrences in themselves interesting, and though I urged him to write on this tragic incident, I little expected him to act on my suggestion. There appears now a beautiful elegiac poem....⁸⁴

We are able to see, from a reading of Crabb Robinson's diary and Dorothy's Journal (a daily account of the journey), that Wordsworth, while throwing over the poems "a certain colouring of imagination", generally selects the commonplace as his subject and, in so doing, captures the spirit of the place in an unpretentious and truthful light.

The 1820 Memorials consists of thirty-eight poems: eighteen poems of varying metre and form and twenty-one sonnets (including the dedication). It begins with three sonnets, one entitled "Fish-Women.—On Landing at Calais" and two entitled "Brugès", a city which appealed to the poet because of its time-honoured traditions and air of humble piety. Dorothy's impression of the place, recorded in her entries for July 13 and 14, concludes with the observation that the streets bear

⁸⁴H.C.R.: Books and Their Writers, I, 249.

"no stamp of progress or of decay. One might fancy that as the city had been built so it had remained."⁸⁵ Both sonnets (II and III) capture the grace and tranquil spirit of Brugès, the first depicting it in the light of the setting sun:

Brugès I saw attired with golden light
 (Streamed from the west) as with a robe of power:
 The splendour fled; and now the sunless hour,
 That, slowly making way for peaceful night, 4
 Best suits with fallen grandeur, to my sight
 Offers the beauty, the magnificence,
 And sober graces, left her for defence
 Against the injuries of time, the spite 8
 Of fortune, and the desolating storms
 Of future war. Advance not—spare to hide,
 O gentle Power of darkness! these mild hues;
 Obscure not yet these silent avenues 12
 Of stateliest architecture, where the Forms
 Of nun-like females, with soft motion glide! 86

The first sight of Brugès is at sunset when the city seems to be robed in gold. A splendid sight, it is nevertheless, for Wordsworth, less suited to Brugès's state of "fallen grandeur" than is the dusk which follows. At this time when day's "mutable distinctions" are erased,⁸⁷ the city is made beautiful by the robe of dusk which protects her from the depredations of past and future time. Wordsworth thus adjures darkness to check the advance which will obscure the scene of muted life - of quiet colours, dignified buildings, and gliding female forms clad in dark hues and appropriately sober and modest.

The traditional sonnet theme of the onslaught of Time, seen in terms of architecture, is presented through imagery of changing light falling on objects in a way that is characteristically Romantic. In this respect the poem suggests a painting. The shift of colour in the sonnet from the bright gold of sunset through the muted hues of twilight to the suggestion of darkness holding off (implicit in the final line from which the nun-like females seem to glide out into the approaching night) is given direction by the structure of the sonnet. Sunset and

⁸⁵ Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. (1941; rpt. Connecticut: Archon, 1970), II, 18; hereafter cited as D.W. Journals.

⁸⁶ PWO, III, 165.

⁸⁷ See Ch. II, p.49 of this thesis.

darkness at the outer limits of the sonnet appear to enfold dusk at the centre, creating an impression of the daily cycle of time itself preserving Brugès at the hour of dusk. Wordsworth suggests dusk's lingering by curtailing the first quatrain which presents the light of sunset, and by delaying the turn to mid-line 10, well beyond its conventional position, thereby seeming to halt the oncoming darkness. The idea of darkness exists not only as a power that is called upon by the poet to halt its advance but also as part of the imagery in the last line. The "long black mantle" which, Wordsworth tells us in a note to the poem, is "universally worn by the females"⁸⁸ makes it clear that the final line, far from being a sentimental gesture, is an exact visual observation and is part of the imagery of light through which the argument is conducted. These women, it is just implied, are personifications of the city and their black robes to be preferred to the lost golden robe of sunset. The image of a garment clothing the city (which we first find in sonnet in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802")⁸⁹ is thus also sustained through to the end of the sonnet where it adds to the shift of colour that is part of the resolution. There is present, at the last, a wonderful sense of the nun-like females as harbingers of the night, gliding out of the sonnet, as it were, to meet the oncoming darkness and become cloistered by it.

The city's decline from greatness is not ignored by the poet. Time is presented in two aspects in the poem: the daily cycle which, as we have seen, is kind to Brugès and protects it; and the lapse of ages which threatens the city and which has destroyed some of its former glory. The truth of Wordsworth's depiction and his concern with ordinariness are brought out in that he does not choose to halt the golden lustre of sunset. Instead, he presents the city in the gloom of evening when, to him, its character is best revealed. The "tender melancholy" of the place to which Dorothy alludes is part of this character,⁹⁰ and the plundering of time is partly responsible for the air of melancholy. But an impression is yet created of time itself preserving Brugès, besieging

⁸⁸ PWO, III, 467.

⁸⁹ PWO, III, 38.

⁹⁰ D.W. Journals, II, 17, July 14.

it, maybe, but not succeeding in breaking through the defences which, with time, it has managed to build up. The idea - of the city's enduring - is continued in the next sonnet when, in the morning (which time of day we gather it to be from Dorothy's Journal),⁹¹ Brugès is depicted as "one vast temple" dedicated to a peace more profound than that found in deserts.

After "Incident at Brugès" (IV), a poem of five stanzas which is an account of an event that took place in 1828 and which was first published in the series in 1835, sonnets V through to IX, a hymn (X), and sonnet XI describe scenes and incidents from the journey through Belgium and Germany. An impression of comparatively rapid travel is conveyed by this group of poems when it is contrasted to the greater number (XII - XXXIII) which record the travellers' experiences in the Alpine Regions, in Italy, and in Switzerland especially. This stage, represented by twenty-two of the thirty-eight poems, forms the centre, or focal point, of the sequence, and it is followed by nos. XXXIV-XXXVII which carry a suggestion of a relatively swift homeward journey similar in pace to that of the first section. These contrasts of tempo that are set up seem to serve two purposes. In the first instance, Wordsworth does not yield to a mere diarizing of events as they occur on a journey, avoiding what could become a tedious chronicle of a tour. Aubin has pointed out that the form of Bowles's Fourteen Sonnets is that of a "fragmentary tour, impressions of one spot after another without regular narrative links", and that this form was later adopted by Wordsworth. And what he says further on of the Descriptive Sketches is equally true of the 1820 Memorials (and the tour poems in general): "...Wordsworth in his Descriptive Sketches...taken during a Pedestrian Tour in the Alps (1793) will not submit to the shackles of the versified diary and jumps nimbly from one spot to another, indulging his bent for history, moral and social ideas, and picturesque genre scenes."⁹² Secondly, the poet is able to vary the pace of the poem, cultivating the effect of an introductory section which moves into the centre or focus of the poem and a conclusion that leads away from it; or a beginning, a middle, and an end, such, as we have already seen, he believed any legitimate

⁹¹ D.W. Journals, II, 17, July 14.

⁹² Aubin, pp.253 and 255.

composition ought to have. Most of the longer lyrics are to be found in the middle of the series (fifteen of the twenty-two in this central group, and fifteen of the eighteen in the sequence) and there is consequently a weight of material there greater than at either end of the series where most of the sonnets are located.

An impressive three-part sonnet (V) commemorates a visit to Waterloo which Wordsworth was bound to have found affecting. A vision of a goddess burdened with trophies of victory who hovers above the battlefield vanishes

leaving prospect blank and cold
Of wind-swept corn that wide around us rolled
In dreary billows, wood, and meagre cot,
And monuments that soon must disappear; ⁹³

Nothing but a few monuments remain to feed the spirit of patriotism or to preserve the memory of those who died there, but Wordsworth unerringly senses that visible signs of the battle can convey little of the slaughter that took place and, instead, finds a "dread...recompense" in feeling

as men should feel
With such vast hoards of hidden carnage near,
And horror breathing from the silent ground!

Or, as Dorothy expresses it in her entry for July 17, there was "little to be seen; but much to be felt;- sorrow and sadness, and even something like horror breathed out of the ground as we stood upon it!".⁹⁴

Rivers, waterfalls and ecclesiastical architecture form the subjects of the following seven sonnets, combining the picturesque with the poet's thoughts on mutability and time. This blending of natural objects and man-made objects, and the contemplation of human transience that they inspire, is continued throughout the series, culminating in the "Desultory Stanzas" which, like the "After-Thought" of *The River Duddon*, presents the philosophic meaning of the poem as it appears to the poet on looking backward at the journey. Travel seems to have moved Wordsworth to thoughts on mutability and in this sequence, as in much of the poetry of these and later years, it is a central theme. The uncompleted

⁹³ PWO, III, 167.

⁹⁴ D.W. Journals, II, 29.

tower of Cologne Cathedral is the subject of sonnet VIII, "In the Cathedral at Cologne", in which Wordsworth laments the unfinished structure and wishes for the "help of Angels" to complete it. The tower reminded Mary of the splendid elegiac lines (12-14) from "Malham Cove" (1818)⁹⁵ and to them I add the preceding two lines which, with those she quotes, form a more profound statement on the subject than is offered in this sonnet of 1820:

Foundations must be laid
In Heaven; for, 'mid the wreck of IS and WAS,
Things incomplete and purposes betrayed
Make sadder transits o'er thought's optic glass
Than noblest objects utterly decayed.⁹⁶

The next sonnet, "In a Carriage upon the Banks of the Rhine" (IX), skilfully suggests, in its structure, the trip taken along the Rhine in a carriage driven by postilions who, according to Wordsworth, were intoxicated and "whisked us far too fast through those beautiful scenes".⁹⁷ The reeling motion of the vehicle is captured in the rhythms of the first part of the sonnet which is also the occasion for what is probably the most compressed and objective utterance on the nature of time in the series.

Amid this dance of objects sadness steals
O'er the defrauded heart—while sweeping by,
As in a fit of Thespian jollity,
Beneath her vine-leaf crown the green Earth reels: 4
Backward, in rapid evanescence, wheels
The venerable pageantry of Time,
Each beetling rampart, and each tower sublime,
And what the Dell unwillingly reveals 8
Of lurking cloistral arch, through trees espied
Near the bright River's edge. Yet why repine?
To muse, to creep, to halt at will, to gaze—
Such sweet way-faring—of life's spring the pride,¹²
Her summer's faithful joy—that still is mine,
And in fit measure cheers autumnal days.⁹⁸

The image of Time as a series of scenes flashing by and disappearing before there is time to do more than note what they are is a

⁹⁵ PWO, III, 470.

⁹⁶ PWO, III, 37, ll.10-14.

⁹⁷ PWO, III, 471.

⁹⁸ PWO, III, 169.

resplendently visual one. Wordsworth appears to observe the pageantry with an air of detachment, as if he is watching a play. The almost crazed manner of the procession of tableaux wheeling drunkenly past is partly responsible for this and it evokes from the poet a comment on the nature of Time that is aphoristic and dispassionate. At the delayed turn of the sonnet (mid-line 10), an impression is created of the earth's steadying itself and the slow-moving rhythms of the last lines contrast strongly with the extended octave giving point to the sense of gratitude Wordsworth feels at the strength he still has to view life's scenes in his chosen way. At fifty, the "autumnal days" of his life may be with him, but he is yet a fit and active man at this time, but for the customary trouble with his eyes. His adventurous spirit seems not to have left him. Among the numerous accounts of his zest for walking and exploring during these months is one by his sister (August 15) which suggests that the desire "To muse, to creep, to halt at will, to gaze" is, at times, supplanted by the ambition to undertake more daring exploits:

We breakfasted in view of the flashing, silver-topped Mount Titlis, and its grey crags, a sight that roused W.'s youthful desires; and in spite of weak eyes and the weight of fifty winters; he could not repress a longing to ascend that mountain. He had much earnest talk with the Waiter, who had attended an English gentleman on that perilous adventure, and...described ...his resolution never again to trust himself to like perils. But my brother had his own visions of glory, and, had he been twenty years younger, sure I am that he would have trod the summit of the Titlis....⁹⁹

The poems at the centre of the series describe such scenes as the travellers coming across a "votive stone" bearing the name of Aloys Reding, a Swiss patriot (XIV); a group of "harvest Damsels" who, returning home on the Lake of Brientz, break into song (XVII); the famous hill, Engelberg (XVIII); the Tower of Tell which, Wordsworth tells us, "is said to stand upon the very ground where grew the Lime Tree against which his [Tell's] Son was placed when the Father's archery was put to proof under the circumstances so famous in Swiss History" (XX);¹⁰⁰ and the ruins of Fort Fuentes which characteristically lead

⁹⁹ D.W. Journals, II, 147.

¹⁰⁰ PWO, III, 477-78.

the poet to thoughts of mutability and the part Nature plays in assimilating the ruins into its surroundings (XXIII). Two sonnets are amongst this group, "The Town of Schwytz" (XXI) and "On hearing the 'Ranz Des Vaches' on the Top of the Pass of St. Gothard" (XXII). The latter was composed, according to Crabb Robinson, as the fulfilment of a promise made him by Wordsworth. The party was overtaken on the pass by a young Swiss who had with him a flute. Crabb Robinson, in compliance with the poet's wishes, asked him to play the Ranchez des Vaches on condition that the poet wrote a sonnet about the event.¹⁰¹

A theme which is to recur in more than one sonnet after 1820 is enunciated in no. XXVI, "The Last Supper, by Leonardo da Vinci, in the Refectory of the Convent of Maria Della Grazia - Milan". Praise of the art of painting is first given poetic expression by Wordsworth in "Upon the Sight of a Beautiful Picture" composed in 1811 in response to Beaumont's picture of the Coleorton landscape. Beaumont's work, though now not considered of much merit, earns high praise from Wordsworth for its beauty and the artist's skill but, above all, because it is able to give

To one brief moment caught from fleeting time
The appropriate calm of blest eternity.¹⁰²

We know that Wordsworth paid less attention to a painter's technique than he did to the meaning of a picture and that he did not have the power to distinguish the real merit of, for example, Constable, preferring the inferior Beaumont. He points out himself, in a note to the sonnet on Leonardo's painting, that he is no connoisseur.¹⁰³ He was, however, safer in his judgement of traditionally established painting, it would seem, and, in the sonnet on The Last Supper, mentions certain significant details of the composition such as individual features of Christ's face, his pose, the position of his hand. Martha Hale Shackford has shown that he generally chooses as the subject for his poem a painting in which there is either a single figure or a dominating figure,¹⁰⁴ such as Christ

¹⁰¹ H.C.R.: Books and Their Writers, I, 250.

¹⁰² PWO, III, 6.

¹⁰³ PWO, III, 481.

¹⁰⁴ Martha Hale Shackford, Wordsworth's Interest in Painters and Pictures (1945; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1976), p.6.

in this picture. Although the painting has been disfigured by time and retouched by others, it has in it for Wordsworth, as his note explains, a power which copies of it have not attained. A painting which shows the activity of the imagination would always, for the poet, be superior to mere copying, however skilful. In The Last Supper, it is seen, once again, that the power of the "silent Art" can catch an historic moment and hold it for eternity. By suspending time, the painter can affect the viewer with the nature of his subject which is timeless.

Tho' searching damps and many an envious flaw
 Have marred this Work; the calm ethereal grace,
 The love deep-seated in the Saviour's face,
 The mercy, goodness, have not failed to awe 4
 The Elements; as they do melt and thaw
 The heart of the Beholder—and erase
 (At least for one rapt moment) every trace
 Of disobedience to the primal law. 8
 The annunciation of the dreadful truth
 Made to the Twelve, survives: lip, forehead, cheek,
 And hand reposing on the board in ruth
 Of what it utters, while the unguilty seek 12
 Unquestionable meanings—still bespeak
 A labour worthy of eternal youth! 105

The poem is an important one in terms of its contribution to the chief themes of the sequence. Colouring almost all of the poems in the series is a contemplative awareness of human transience and mutability such as there is in The River Duddon and, of course, in a great deal of the earlier poetry, The Excursion (1814) representing Wordsworth's most comprehensive poetic statement on the subject. As even the earliest of the mature poetry shows, the poet thought almost continually about time and process. Stelzig and Oscar James Campbell have pointed out that, with the death of Wordsworth's brother John in 1805, mutability emerged as a major theme in the poetry and it remained a favourite subject until the last.¹⁰⁶ What does change, naturally enough, is the poet's outlook and attitude to mortality. We have seen, in The River Duddon, an active shift in perspective from the view that paradise is to be found in Nature to a vision of an eternity which lies beyond the natural creation.

¹⁰⁵ PWO, III, 183-84.

¹⁰⁶ Stelzig, p.624; Oscar James Campbell, "Wordsworth's Conception of the Esthetic Experience" in Wordsworth and Coleridge: Studies in Honor of George McLean Harper, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (1939; rpt. New York: Russell, 1962), pp.34-35.

Wordsworth's search, always for truth, becomes increasingly a spiritual quest for an immutable peace that eventually leads him to an acceptance of a religious faith. This I believe to be an inevitable change in Wordsworth's ideas brought about by his continuing search for meaning, and not, as many believe, a betrayal of his former beliefs. As Campbell so accurately says: "When Wordsworth realized that the essential law of Nature was change and that mutability destroyed man's most precious beliefs, he sought not only a religion but also an esthetic norm beyond nature - one that might produce in him through its permanence and stability unchanging peace."¹⁰⁷

The 1820 Memorials are, in a certain sense, an expression of the poet's recognition of a life beyond that of Nature, a life not of this world but of another; in short, a Christian eternity. In the poem "After-Thought" (XVI), he is moved to exclaim:

Heaven upon earth's an empty boast;
But, for the bowers of Eden lost,
Mercy has placed within our reach
A portion of God's peace. ¹⁰⁸

Such peace permeates the poems, many of which have as their subjects the religious faith, churches and convents of the inhabitants of countries through which the travellers pass. Even the natural features of these places lead Wordsworth to thoughts of the spirit. "Cliffs, fountains, rivers, seasons, times", he says, "Let all remind the soul of heaven" (The Church of San Salvador, XXIV). In "The Eclipse of the Sun, 1820", imagining the phenomenon in the Lake District, the poet writes:

I ask in vain—and know far less
If sickness, sorrow, or distress
Have spared my Dwelling to this hour;
Sad blindness! but ordained to prove
Our faith in Heaven's unfailling love
And all-controlling power. ¹⁰⁹

The tour, then, would seem to be more than a physical journey through Europe; it becomes an inward moving spiritual quest representing man's search for peace of mind and ^{evidence of} immortality. Seen in this light, the sonnet

¹⁰⁷ Campbell, p.37.

¹⁰⁸ PWO, III, 174.

¹⁰⁹ PWO, III, 186.

on The Last Supper, the only poem exclusively about a picture in the series, seems to become a visual focal point of the collection. Emblematic of a central resting place on the journey, it presents to the poet human embodiment of the Christian virtues - grace, love, mercy, and goodness - that are at the heart of the spiritual search. It is as if the sonnet is a picture itself before which we can stop and examine the details, being led, as we would be by a painting, from the perspective in the foreground to the meditative distance and then back to the foreground. Wordsworth had begun composition of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets (which he thought of as pictures)¹¹⁰ when he wrote this series and he used the sonnet more than once to comment on the art of painting, a practice which suggests that he was aware of the potential of the form to create a picture by means of poetry.

The homeward journey and arrival at Dover after a delay at Boulogne (XXXV) are traced through sonnets XXIV - XXXVII. Wordsworth expresses his joy at returning to England much as he did in 1802¹¹¹ in a sonnet which reminds us of the earlier landing:

Where be the noisy followers of the game
Which faction breeds? the turmoil where, that passed
Through Europe, echoing from the newsman's blast,
And filled our hearts with grief for England's shame? 4
Peace greets us; —rambling on without an aim
We mark majestic herds of cattle, free
To ruminate, couched on the grassy lea;
And hear far-off the mellow horn proclaim 8
The Season's harmless pastime. Ruder sound
Stirs not; enrapt I gaze with strange delight,
While consciousnesses, not to be disowned,
Here only serve a feeling to invite 12
That lifts the spirit to a calmer height,
And makes this rural stillness more profound. 112

Lines 1-4 refer to the inquiry instigated by Lord Liverpool in July into Queen Caroline's right to the title and the annulment of her marriage, the details of which, according to Wordsworth, had seemed to shock all of Europe.¹¹³ But not even the harm which the affair had done England's

¹¹⁰ See pp.140-42 below.

¹¹¹ PWO, III, 114, Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, I. X.

¹¹² PWO, III, 197-98.

¹¹³ MY, 1811-20, p.903, W.W. to Lord Lonsdale, October 7, 1820.

name could mar the poet's joy of his homecoming. His delight at being on English soil once more is expressed as a profound peace of spirit which the "majestic herds of cattle, free / To ruminare" seem to symbolize. In 1802, on his return from France, Wordsworth experienced elation,

joy enough and pride
For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass
of England once again...

Now, eighteen years later, it is the soothing influence of the countryside that calms his spirit after a journey across the ocean which has, as the next sonnet informs us,

set free
[His] sense from pressure of life's common din; 114

The 1820 Memorials were composed concurrently with the Ecclesiastical Sonnets and, in the sense that they are both concerned with the search of the spirit for peace in a world of change, they share a common aim. A great deal more explicit in the latter poem, the emphasis on matters of the spirit is nevertheless an important part of the Memorials where it takes the form predominantly of a contemplation of places and habits of worship in Europe. The physical journey undertaken in the 1820 Memorials is, in some ways, a precursor of the more specifically religious-centred journey through the ages of Christianity in the poem about Church history. Both poems develop the idea of Christian eternity beyond the promise of one glimpsed in The River Duddon; in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, most explicitly, it is attainable through an adherence to Christian faith.

These poems which have as their occasions Wordsworth's travels through Europe can be seen as an attempt by the poet to move beyond the poetry of personal experience and of earthly beauty. His love for the works of Nature and Man does not desert him, nor does it give way to an abstract contemplation of the purely philosophical, but his efforts to transcend time and transience become less personal and subjective and lead him to look further than the natural creation for stability and unchanging peace. In dedicating his poetic powers to concerns of the spirit, he distances himself from the immediacy of personal experience

¹¹⁴ PWO, III, 198.

and directs his search for "central peace, subsisting at the heart / Of endless agitation"¹¹⁵ towards a life beyond that of human time.

III

I, who accompanied with faithful pace
 Cerulean Duddon from its cloud-fed spring,
 And loved with spirit ruled by his to sing
 Of mountain-quiet and boon nature's grace; 4
 I, who essayed the nobler Stream to trace
 Of Liberty, and smote the plausible string
 Till the checked torrent, proudly triumphing,
 Won for herself a lasting resting-place;
 Now seek upon the heights of Time the source 8
 Of a HOLY RIVER, on whose banks are found
 Sweet pastoral flowers, and laurels that have crowned
 Full oft the unworthy brow of lawless force; 12
 And, for delight of him who tracks its course,
 Immortal amaranth and palms abound. 116

The sonnet quoted above, "Introduction", heads the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, a three-part series of a hundred and thirty-two sonnets that trace the history of Christianity and the Christian Church in England from pagan times to Wordsworth's day. The poet tells us that he is setting out in search of the source of a Holy River "upon the heights of Time" which he intends to follow to its end in "the eternal City" ("Conclusion", III. XLVII), having journeyed before along Nature's River, the Duddon, and having traced the Stream of Liberty through the Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, first published in 1815. The introductory sonnet alerts us to a number of central concerns of the sequence. The source of the Holy River is to be sought upon the heights of Time and, for those who follow its course, "Immortal amaranth and palms" are the reward. The themes of mutability and time, never far from Wordsworth's mind and poetry, lie at the centre of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets which represents, in one sense, his attempt to come to terms with mutability, an effort which receives its fullest expression in the best-known sonnet of the series, itself entitled "Mutability" (III. XXXIV).

¹¹⁵ PWO, V, 145, The Excursion, IV, ll.1146-47.

¹¹⁶ PWO, III, 341.

The allusion to Paradise Lost in the "Immortal amaranth" of the last line signifies a desire to establish the validity of the Holy River as a metaphor that has come down in English literature and that has been ennobled by a great poet of the Christian faith. The relevant Miltonic passage (III. 351-59) describes the angels honouring the Son of God who has declared that He will die for mankind:

With solemn adoration down they cast
Their crowns inwove with amarant and gold,
Immortal amarant, a flower which once
In Paradise, fast by the tree of life
Began to bloom, but soon for man's offence
To heaven removed where first it grew, there grows,
And flowers aloft shading the fount of life,
And where the river of bliss through midst of heaven
Rolls o'er Elisian flowers her amber stream; 117

As Fowler has pointed out in a note to these lines, the image of the river to describe the joy of the believer appears in many Biblical passages.¹¹⁸ Thus, besides allying his sympathies with those of Milton, Wordsworth is showing us that his river is more than a personal image which he adopts to give unity to the poems of the sequence; it is traditionally a symbol of holy water and, in the ecclesiastical poem, it merges with the traditional image of a journey of discovery along a river. It is nevertheless a natural feature, representing the poet's love for the natural world and, as such, it forms an appropriate background to the poems whose account of Christian influence in England is not limited to the organization of the Church but extends to man and Nature. We are informed, in this sonnet, not only that Wordsworth is once again to use a stream to give unity to his sequence but also that his interests in Nature and Liberty will be fused with the religious concerns of the series. Through the ages the river has been witness to "lawless forces" that have threatened the liberty of the Church of England, and therefore of England herself, and these forces receive considerable attention in the series. The "pastoral flowers" and "laurels" of line 11, almost certainly literary flowers,¹¹⁹ yet suggest

¹¹⁷ The Poems of John Milton, pp.581-82.

¹¹⁸ The Poems of John Milton, p.581.

¹¹⁹ Wordsworth: Poems, II, 998. Hayden compares ll.10-11 of the "Introduction" to ll.40-41 of Virgil's Eclogues IX which C. Day Lewis translates as "The river banks are spangled / With flowers of many hues", The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil, trans. C. Day Lewis, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p.40.

that Wordsworth is alluding to his own kind of realistic pastoral, a suggestion that is borne out by those sonnets in the series that contain descriptions and images of the natural world that are clearly not symbolic but that form a literal background to an imaginary river. These flowers grow along the banks of the river in company with "palms" and the "Immortal amaranth", the former an established Christian symbol, the latter becoming one via Milton who converts what had previously been a flower with connotations of a pagan heaven to a Christian one. In the "Introduction", then, we are informed that there is to be no separation of the poet's love of Nature and of liberty from his chronicle of the Church. It is, in fact, partly this fusion of interests that is responsible for the success of the sequence: it is at once more attractive than would be the history of Christianity as a purely theological account, and more Wordsworthian.

A combination of three events appears to have inspired Wordsworth to write the Ecclesiastical Sonnets. In November, 1820, he visited his brother Christopher in Cambridge where he composed a sonnet (possibly more than one) which eventually became part of the series. In all likelihood, the sonnet "Inside of King's College, Cambridge" (III.XLIII) was the one to have been written there.¹²⁰ Soon after this visit, the poet was staying with Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton where, he tells us, in an introductory note to the series, he accompanied his friend on a walk through the estate

with a view to fix upon the site of a new Church which he intended to erect. It was one of the most beautiful mornings of a mild season,—our feelings were in harmony with the cherishing influences of the scene; and such being our purpose, we were naturally led to look back upon past events with wonder and gratitude, and on the future with hope. Not long afterwards, some of the Sonnets which will be found towards the close of this series were produced as a private memorial of that morning's occupation.

These sonnets (probably III.XXXIX-XLI) were the first to have been composed consciously for the series. Wordsworth goes on to say:

The Catholic Question, which was agitated in Parliament about that time, kept my thoughts in the same course; and it struck me that certain points in the Ecclesiastical

¹²⁰ See Moorman, LY, p.389; and PWO, III, 573.

History of our Country might advantageously be presented to view in verse. Accordingly, I took up the subject, and what I now offer to the reader was the result. ¹²¹

Having decided to write the poem, Wordsworth spent the following year reading in preparation for the composition which was to be his most widely researched work. In the prose notes to the sonnets he refers to at least thirteen sources of ecclesiastical history, the chief of these being Bede, Stillingfleet, Sharon Turner, Fuller, Daniel, Drayton, Foxe, Walton, Dyer and Heylin. The Ecclesiastical Sonnets are generally held to be among the least interesting of the poet's compositions, one reason being that they follow too closely their prose sources and are as a result unimaginative. Johnson, for example, is of the opinion that "the preponderance of factual and historical materials has a detrimental influence on the poetic quality of the sequence". He adds that Wordsworth's diction is "often not his own, in the sense that he frequently transfers prose passages intact".¹²² De Selincourt agrees that "poems which so closely follow prose authorities, often even incorporating their phraseology...lack imaginative colour...."¹²³ Wordsworth himself was conscious of the danger of writing a long poem that must, to a large extent, be a factual account if it is to be an accurate and truthful report of history. In a letter to Richard Sharp of 16 April, 1822, he wrote:

The Ecc. Sketches labour under one obvious disadvantage, that they can only present themselves as a whole to the reader, who is pretty well acquainted with the history of this country; and, as separate pieces, several of them suffer as poetry from the matter of fact, there being unavoidably in all history, except as it is a mere suggestion, something that enslaves the Fancy.

But Wordsworth adds that "there are in those Poems several continuous strains, not in the least degree liable to this objection", and mentions the sonnets on the Dissolution of the Monasteries and almost the whole of the last part as examples.¹²⁴ (At this time the third part consisted

¹²¹ PWO, III, 556-57.

¹²² Johnson, pp.153-54.

¹²³ PWO, III, 558.

¹²⁴ LY, 1821-30, pp.65-66.

of twenty-eight sonnets.) There are many more, and, even when presenting the "matter of fact", some have thrown over them "a certain colouring of imagination", as Wordsworth termed it,¹²⁵ that rescues them from a possible tediousness. Apart from the interest provided by the poet's own sensibility, his allusions are frequently to sources which are themselves of a high poetic merit. While quoting a fine phrase or alluding to a praiseworthy source does not in itself justify the act, the appearance of such material in the series, particularly as Wordsworth assimilates it, both complements his work and brings in to the sequence a literary weight of allusion. And then there is his habit of accommodating quotation in sonnet which, as we have seen before, is peculiarly successful.¹²⁶ It is remarkable that in so curtailed a form Wordsworth finds room for quotation; one would expect it more frequently in longer and more expansive verse such as The Prelude and The Excursion where there is indeed a little. Wordsworth would appear to be a rather unusual sonneteer in this respect of deliberate quotation which is meant to be recognized as such. In none of the great writers of sonnet before him is the usage frequent, if it is there at all, though allusions to the work of other writers may abound; and it does not seem to be a practice in late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century sonnet. Usually, of course, the quotations are poetic shorthand for a good deal, but even so, the space that the sonnet allows is not easily able to support quotation. The habit would seem to represent the poet's attempts to send down within the "scanty plot of ground" roots that can reach far into the soil and thus nourish the growth of the reader's Imagination by means of allusion.

The 1845 edition of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets consists of a three-part series of a hundred and thirty-two sonnets. The first edition, entitled Ecclesiastical Sketches, contained a hundred and two of these, thirty being added (mostly to Part III) in successive editions. Wordsworth organized the poems into chronological divisions: Part I, "From the Introduction of Christianity into Britain to the Consummation of the Papal Dominion"; Part II, "To the Close of the Troubles in the

¹²⁵ PWO, II, 386, Preface to Lyrical Ballads; and see p.123 above.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Ch. II, pp.56-57 of this thesis.

Reign of Charles I"; Part III, "From the Restoration to the Present Times". His purpose, he tells us, "was, as much as possible, to confine [his] view to the introduction, progress, and operation of the Church in England, both previous and subsequent to the Reformation". He chose to present this view in sonnet form for "the convenience of passing from one point of the subject to another without shocks of abruptness". Wordsworth's idea (he says) was to create a series of pictures "often so closely connected as to have jointly the effect of passages of a poem in a form of stanza",¹²⁷ an idea that took shape in a work of fine coherence and proportion. A reading of the sequence takes us through a pageant of historical scenes and events, each linked to the next by the chronological progress of Christianity, the whole given fluidity by the metaphor of the stream. With hindsight, one can say that Wordsworth's choice of the sonnet was undoubtedly the right one. The pictorial effect for which he was striving is created by the individual poems, each presenting an aspect of the past and, towards the end, of his own period. This effect is given further emphasis in the titles to many of the sonnets which suggest titles of pictures. Portraits are created, for example, of "Laud" (II.XLV), "Cranmer" (II.XXXV), "Alfred" (I.XXVI) and other prominent religious or historical figures. Historical paintings are suggested in the titles "The Council of Clermont" (I.XXXIII), "Archbishop Chicheley to Henry V" (II.XV), "Edward Signing the Warrant for the Execution of Joan of Kent" (II.XXXII), and "Inside of King's College Chapel, Cambridge" (III.XLIII). Titles such as these produce the general impression of a procession of pictures which bear a relation to each other but which are marked off as individual compositions. Had Wordsworth attempted the poem in a less self-contained form of stanza he might have had to sacrifice this particular pictorial effect and the potential created by the sonnet to pass from one aspect of his topic to another "without shocks of abruptness".

There is, further, in these sonnets, as Johnson has remarked in a different context,¹²⁸ a concern with the effect of shades of light such as one finds in the art of painting. This takes the form of a symbolic

¹²⁷ PWO, III, 557.

¹²⁸ Johnson, p.147.

progression through the series from the darkness of primitive times, which predominates in the first part, to the bright light in which most of the final scenes are enacted. But there are also numerous explicit references to shades of light and to chiaroscuro in the sonnets which suggest that Wordsworth had the techniques of painting in mind as he composed, and that he attempted to imitate the effects produced on a canvas in his poems. So, in Part I for example, "the primal truth / Glimmers through many a superstitious form" (IV); "the solitary shepherd roves / Along the plain of Sarum, by the ghost / Of Time and shadows of Tradition crost" (V); "The Pictish cloud darkens the enervate land / By Rome abandoned" (IX); and "Heaven's high will / Permits a second and a darker shade / Of Pagan night" (XI). Further on, sonnet XXIV has as its title "Saxon Monasteries, and Lights and Shades of the Religion". These allusions to light and dark, ubiquitous in each Part, continue throughout the series until, in the final two sonnets, the light of the Spirit becomes an illuminating force. The penultimate sonnet, "Ejaculation" (III.XLVI) concludes with the words

...let us seek the light,
 Studious of that pure intercourse begun
 When first our infant brows their lustre won;
 So, like the Mountain, may we grow more bright
 From unimpeded commerce with the Sun,
 At the approach of all-involving night. 129

And, at the last, in sonnet XLVII, "Conclusion", the River itself, shot with gleams of light "ever and anon" as it rolled through the ages (II.VII), casts off all shadows and emerges as a stream of bright light:

The living Waters, less and less by guilt
 Stained and polluted, brighten as they roll,
 Till they have reached the eternal City - built
 For the perfected Spirits of the just! 130

We move through the poems as through a gallery of pictures (Wordsworth is writing a type of progress poem but in sonnet form), passing from one aspect of the subject to the next; and at the conclusion we realize that we have progressed through an account of Church history, epic in scope, that is most skilfully compressed and coherently arranged in a regularity

¹²⁹ PWO, III, 407.

¹³⁰ PWO, III, 407.

of form remarkable for its evenness and proportion. It is on this arrangement of the sonnets that the design rests. The metaphor of the stream helps to unify the poem and connect the three parts, appearing in the foreground at irregular intervals, usually there as background to the poems, or submerged. But, in terms of the design of the sequence, it is of secondary importance to the pictorial framework of a gallery or pageant. The organization of the sonnets as a series of pictures imposes an orderliness on the poem which contains, in neat units of fourteen lines each, verse of an epic scope.

Part I examines the early growth of Christianity in England and the threats it encounters from, for example, Druidic superstition, persecution, and temptation in the form of Roman life. Its various fortunes under Roman, Saxon, Danish and Norman rule are described, and the rise of Catholicism which reaches a height of power concludes the section. Early monastic life, prior to the time of the Reformation, and the sacred structures of the monasteries are seen to encourage a simple and industrious faith, while missionaries and crusaders receive Wordsworth's unqualified praise. For all the sonnets, not only these of Part I, he has chosen occasions that represent outstanding events in Christian history that are close to his interests. As Harper says, by using the sonnet form Wordsworth "escaped the danger of seeming to attempt anything like a systematic discourse, and could select without much restraint some of the really inspiring moments and figures of Church history".¹³¹ One such figure is St. Alban, "England's first Martyr, whom no threats could shake" (VI), and another is St. Dunstan, a Benedictine Abbot of the tenth century, whose attempts to strengthen the Benedictine order Wordsworth, following Sharon Turner, saw as one of the causes for the second Danish invasion of Britain. In the sonnet "Influence Abused" (XXVIII), Dunstan's rise to power is compared by implication to Macbeth's reign of terror:

Urged by Ambition, who with subtlest skill
Changes her means, the Enthusiast as a dupe
Shall soar, and as a hypocrite can stoop,
And turn the instruments of good to ill,
Moulding the credulous people to his will.
Such DUNSTAN:— from its Benedictine coop

4

¹³¹ Harper, p.574

Issues the master Mind, at whose fell swoop
 The chaste affections tremble to fulfil 8
 Their purposes. Behold, pre-signified,
 The Might of spiritual sway! his thoughts, his dreams,
 Do in the supernatural world abide:
 So vaunt a throng of Followers, filled with pride 12
 In what they see of virtues pushed to extremes,
 And sorceries of talent misapplied. 132

The essential ideas of thirty-five pages from Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons are condensed into these fourteen lines, and, in addition, as the allusions to Macbeth inform us, the sonnet depends on a second literary source for its full meaning. Macbeth's "vaulting ambition" is seen to possess Dunstan too, before whom the people cower and are powerless, turning from good to evil. In the Shakespearean allusion "at whose fell swoop" (line 7), the Benedictine Abbot is portrayed as a merciless bird of prey that, from its position of power, descends onto its victims below. In Macbeth (IV.iii.217-19), Macduff, having learned that the usurper of the Scottish throne has slaughtered his wife and children, cries

O hell-kite! All?
 What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
 At one fell swoop? 133

The comparison of the two tyrants is sustained through to the conclusion in the suggestion that Dunstan, like Macbeth, uses foul means to further his ambitious aims and deliberately invites demonic powers to assist him. This poem is one of the best examples in the series of the skill with which Wordsworth *condenses* his prose sources into his poem and turns them into verse that is rich in poetical meaning and allusion.

Sonnet XXIII, "Reproof", provides the occasion for a tribute to Bede, Wordsworth's main authority for the period covered by the first twenty-three sonnets. The poem thus doubles as an acknowledgement and as a portrait of a man prominent in the history of Christianity. Thoughts on monastic seclusion (XXI) lead the poet to declare his preference for self-exile in one of Nature's cells (XXII). This in turn leads to a self-reproof (XXIII) administered for "Indulging...a voluptuous indolence" which Bede's example shows the poet's wish to be:

¹³²PWO, III, 355.

¹³³William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p.1021.

Sublime Recluse!

The recreant soul, that dares to shun the debt
 Imposed on human kind, must first forget
 Thy diligence, thy unrelaxing use
 Of a long life; and, in the hour of death,
 The last dear service of thy passing breath! 134

Bede died, Wordsworth tells us, while dictating the concluding words of his translation of St. John's Gospel.¹³⁵

Two figures of Royalty, Alfred (XXVI) and Richard (XXXV), complete the portraits in Part I of famous men who furthered the cause of Christianity. The latter sonnet combines the poet's praise for the king "of courage leonine" with a development of the narrative, illustrating one of the ways in which Wordsworth establishes links between the poems. The octave presents Richard, champion of pilgrims, at sea on one of his great crusades. The sestet is an expression of regret by the poet at being prevented from describing Richard's pursuits of war by his duty to continue with the narrative:

My Song, a fearless homager, would attend
 Thy thundering battle-axe as it cleaves the press
 Of war, but duty summons her away
 To tell— how, finding in the rash distress
 Of those Enthusiasts a subservient friend,
 To giddier heights hath clomb the Papal sway. 136

The stream metaphor is quite frequently used to further the narrative and to recapitulate or point the way ahead. At first a "nascent Stream" (II), it soon becomes a "growing Rill" upon which we are urged to gaze (V). In no. XXXVII, "Papal Abuses", Wordsworth reminds us that we are voyaging along a river, having witnessed violent moments of English history that he attributes to Papal abuse of power:

As with the Stream our voyage we pursue,
 The gross materials of this world present
 A marvellous study of wild accident;
 Uncouth proximities of old and new;
 And bold transfigurations, more untrue
 (As might be deemed) to disciplined intent
 Than aught the sky's fantastic element,
 When most fantastic, offers to the view. 137

¹³⁴ PWO, III, 352-53.

¹³⁵ PWO, III, 353.

¹³⁶ PWO, III, 358.

¹³⁷ PWO, III, 359.

When next the Stream emerges specifically for the purpose of narrative development, it is still presented as muddied and, at times, diverted from its course, but the beneficial influences of religion inspire ^{with hope} those who journey along it:

And what melodious sounds at times prevail!
 And, ever and anon, how bright a gleam
 Pours on the surface of the turbid Stream!
 What heartfelt fragrance mingles with the gale
 That swells the bosom of our passing sail! 138

Troubled times are, on occasion, relieved by periods of peaceful progress when to linger is a temptation to the poet. In the next sonnet (VIII) we see that the efforts of the Crusaders have temporarily smoothed the waters of the ongoing river:

Furl we the sails, and pass with tardy oars
 Through these bright regions, casting many a glance
 Upon the dream-like issues — the romance
 Of many-coloured life that Fortune pours
 Round the Crusaders, till on distant shores
 Their labours end... 139

And in Part III, Wordsworth pauses to look back on the events encountered on the journey to infinity before passing on to the concerns of the Church in his own time, a period of relative tranquillity.

Down a swift Stream, thus far, a bold design
 Have we pursued, with livelier stir of heart
 Than his who sees, borne forward by the Rhine,
 The living landscapes greet him, and depart; 4
 See spires fast sinking — up again to start!
 And strives the towers to number, that recline
 O'er the dark steeps, or on the horizon line
 Striding with shattered crests his eyes athwart. 8
 So have we hurried on with troubled pleasure:
 Henceforth, as on the bosom of a stream
 That slackens, and spreads wide a watery gleam,
 We, nothing loth a lingering course to measure, 12
 May gather up our thoughts, and mark at leisure
 How widely spread the interests of our theme. 140

As the Duddon records the historical journey of man's life from birth, through maturity, to death, so the river in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets

¹³⁸ PWO, III, 365, sonnet VII.

¹³⁹ PWO, III, 365.

¹⁴⁰ PWO, III, 390, sonnet XII.

documents the historical journey of Christianity: its beginnings, its growth, and its dominance in England.

Part II traces the course of Christianity through the Middle Ages to the reign of Charles I, portraying the conflicts of the Reformation, religious struggles involving the Crown and, in general, the emergence of the Church from medieval Christianity through troublesome times to the age of Enlightenment. Throughout this middle section we see Wordsworth adopting a carefully tolerant view of non-Anglican religious practices (including those of the Roman Church), balancing the advantages and disadvantages of the new order which the Reformation ushered in, and regretting, even mourning, some of the old order which had to go, while yet believing in the principles of the new. Paradoxically, it is this tolerant stance which evokes from one commentator criticism of the poet who has elsewhere been censured for inflexible and conservative viewpoints. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, writing of Wordsworth in Religious Trends in English Poetry (1780-1830), considers the poems with few exceptions to be "mildly agitated pieces of rhetoric" which, in general, express no personal religious emotion. The ideas of the poems, he says, "give the impression of being the result of collaboration between a humane Protestant who wishes to say all that can justly be said for Catholicism and a humane Catholic who wishes to be equally polite to Protestantism". Wordsworth, he believes, should have been prepared to tackle theological doctrine in the poems.¹⁴¹ Ironically, each of these charges highlights the merits of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets. Wordsworth seems to have realized that strong religious emotion and the defence of a High Churchman's views could limit the freedom of ideas that he regarded as essential for successful composition and endanger the business of poetry which is to give "immediate pleasure" as well as to teach.¹⁴² His intention was not to discuss theological principles in any detail. The sonnets were written, he tells us, "long before Ecclesiastical History and points of doctrine had excited the interest with which they have been recently enquired into and discussed."¹⁴³ Mary

¹⁴¹Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, 1780-1830, III (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1949), 228.

¹⁴²See Ch. II, p.54 of this thesis.

¹⁴³PWO, III, 557.

Moorman, in her assessment of Wordsworth's attitude in these poems, emphasizes the importance of tolerance in a poem of this kind:

He stands as a 'spectator ab extra' - as Coleridge long ago wished him to stand for the writing of The Recluse - weighing with grave and generous charity the claims of institutions and individuals and habits of worship whose contribution to the 'stream' of English church history had possessed beauty or value, although they had ultimately yielded to new forces and new ways. Nowhere is this more remarkable than in his treatment of the Reformation. Wordsworth was a strong 'reformation-man'. ...Yet, when he came to write of 'this unsparing hurricane', the Reformation, it was with a poetic sympathy and admiration for much that was then rejected, and a consciousness of some of the dangers inherent in the new order of things, which remove these poems far from the category of one-sided polemic. 144

The first sonnet of Part II, an adjuration to Man to avoid perpetuating the errors of the past by keeping the mind free of prejudice, sets the tone for the sonnets to follow.

How soon — alas! did Man, created pure —
 By Angels guarded, deviate from the line
 Prescribed by duty: —woeful forfeiture
 He made by wilful breach of law divine. 4
 With like perverseness did the Church abjure
 Obedience to her Lord, and haste to twine,
 'Mid Heaven-born flowers that shall for aye endure,
 Weeds on whose front the world had fixed her sign. 8
 O Man, — if with thy trials thus it fares,
 If good can smooth the way to evil choice,
 From all rash censure be the mind kept free;
 He only judges right who weighs, compares, 12
 And, in the sternest sentence which his voice
 Pronounces, ne'er abandons Charity. 145

The references to Paradise and "Heaven-born flowers" take us back to the "Introduction", establishing a parallel between man's and the Church's neglect of duty and serving as a warning that with charity and right judgement only can our choice of good be determined. This, and three other sonnets, II, IX and X, were added to Part II in 1845. It is likely that the latter are the three which Wordsworth composed in order to

144 Moorman, LY, p.395.

145 PWO, III, 361-62.

"qualify or mitigate the condemnation which by conscience [he was] compelled to pass upon the abuses of the Roman See".¹⁴⁶

There are a number of sonnets on monastic life, the earlier ones celebrating its valuable contributions to the growth of Christianity. In the first of these, no.III, a Cistercian monastery is seen to spread a gentle influence "round the holy spires", while, in sonnet IV, monks work to free serfs from "legalized oppressions". Hooded Cenobites give wise counsel to the leaders of the world or dedicate their lives, in solitude, to scholarship (V). Then a succession of sonnets (XVIII-XXIII) deals with the corruption of the higher clergy and of monastic communities, once wholly admirable institutions, and with the subsequent dissolution of the monasteries. The effects of action such as this last and of the abrogation of idolatry (XXIV, XXV) receive sympathetic attention in two later sonnets that reflect on the results of the Reformation. The first of these, "Imaginative Regrets" (XXVII), is a powerful sonnet which describes the widespread upheaval in the world of idol-worship, using images of rivers sacred to pagan beliefs which are portrayed as lamenting the overthrow of their dominions:

Deep is the lamentation! Not alone
 From Sages justly honoured by mankind;
 But from the ghostly tenants of the wind,
 Demons and Spirits, many a dolorous groan 4
 Issues for that dominion overthrown:
 Proud Tiber grieves, and far-off Ganges, blind
 As his own worshippers: and Nile, reclined 8
 Upon his monstrous urn, the farewell moan
 Renews. Through every forest, cave, and den,
 Where frauds were hatched of old, hath sorrow past—
 Hangs o'er the Arabian Prophet's native Waste,
 Where once his airy helpers schemed and planned 12
 'Mid spectral lakes bemocking thirsty men,
 And stalking pillars built of fiery sand. 147

The knowledge that it would be madness to hold on to the old, and on to what he regards as ritual foolery (XXVIII), does not deter Wordsworth

¹⁴⁶LY, 1841-50, pp.1137-38; W.W. to S. Wilkinson, September 21, 1842. But see PWO, III, 564, note to sonnet IX. De Selincourt writes that "W. told Professor Reed, in a letter dated Sept.4, 1842, that he had added two sonnets 'in order to do more justice to the Papal Church for the services which she did actually render to Christianity and humanity in the middle ages'". In the letter I have cited, Wordsworth gives the number of sonnets as three.

¹⁴⁷PWO, III, 374.

from revealing the earth-shaking effects that the Reformation had on the world of pagan cults and non-Protestant religious practices. "The Point at Issue" (XXX), however, clarifies the meaning of the Reformation in terms that express belief in its principles and uphold them as the means of drawing man closer to God:

For what contend the wise?— for nothing less
 Than that the Soul, freed from the bonds of Sense,
 And to her God restored by evidence
 Of things not seen, drawn forth from their recess, ⁴
 Root there, and not in forms, her holiness;—
 For Faith, which to the Patriarchs did dispense
 Sure guidance, ere a ceremonial fence
 Was needful round men thirsting to transgress;— ⁸
 For Faith, more perfect still, with which the Lord
 Of all, himself a Spirit, in the youth
 Of Christian aspiration, deigned to fill
 The temples of their hearts who, with his word ¹²
 Informed, were resolute to do his will,
 And worship him in spirit and in truth. 148

The poems for the rest of Part II move through the martyrdoms of Joan of Kent (XXXII), Latimer and Ridley (XXXIV) and Cranmer (XXXV), exalting the persecuted men and women who died for their faith; pay tribute to eminent reformers (XXXIX) and those in exile (XXXVII); and give a general view of the variously destructive and positive influences of religion (XXXVI and XLIII). The section concludes with the troubles in the time of Charles I, but ends on a note of hope with a sonnet (XLVI) in which God's purpose is seen to be constant and enduring from the poet's Psalmic comparison of it with two of the great appearances in Nature:

Like the firmament in his ways: ¹⁴⁹
 His statutes like the chambers of the deep.

Part III continues the chronological account - from the Restoration of Charles II to the Church of Wordsworth's day - for approximately a third of the way before diverging to deal with various offices of the Church and to celebrate ecclesiastical architecture. The narrative line fades somewhat after sonnet XII where Wordsworth announces that it is time to

¹⁴⁸ PWO, III, 375-76.

¹⁴⁹ PWO, III, 384.

gather up our thoughts, and mark at leisure
How widely spread the interests of our theme. ¹⁵⁰

With the spreading of the narrative into diverse ramifications at this point, there is felt a corresponding decrease in the poetic tension of the series, such as there is in the river itself which is the chief image of the poem and which now "slackens, and spreads wide a watery gleam". This change of tempo may have something to do with the subjects of the sonnets that follow which first of all shift the focus from England to America and then become involved in offices of the Church such as "The Liturgy" (XIX), "Baptism" (XX), "Catechising" (XXII) and numerous other aspects of Church worship. As a group they seem to make less of a contribution to the development of the series as a whole than any other section or run of sonnets, possibly because they usually fail to convey the narrative excitement sustained in the poems before them. It is not that their presentation of Church ritual and doctrine is irrelevant to the historical content of the poem - on the contrary it is part of it - but their affiliation to Anglican procedure alienates them in a measure from the objectivity of the series. Wordsworth might have considered them as necessary to complete the picture, but their inclusion can be seen to be at the expense of poetical feeling. It should be noted that fifteen of this group were added to the series after 1822, four in 1827, one in 1832, three in 1842 and seven in 1845. Two of them, "The Marriage Ceremony" (XXVI) and "Funeral Service" (XXXI), were "suggested as necessary by Mr Reed".¹⁵¹ Some are in themselves skilful sonnets and some are not without merit as individual poems, but one is left with the impression that they were composed to swell the numbers of Part III whose concerns the poet might have regarded as of greater importance as he became increasingly interested in offices of the Church. If this section is a weak link in the cycle, it is more than redeemed by the number of outstanding sonnets on church buildings that brings the series to a close. Wordsworth himself liked best these and the succession of poems on the Reformation in Part II, an opinion with which one may happily concur.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ PWO, III, 390.

¹⁵¹ LY, 1841-50, p.1133; W.W. to Dora Quillinan, 17 August, 1842.

¹⁵² LY, 1821-30, p.103; D.W. to Samuel Rogers, January 3, 1823.

The theme of mutability becomes more explicit in Part III as Wordsworth leaves his historical narrative after sonnet XII to contemplate aspects of the Church around him. The first sonnet (III.I) presents a vision of a "lovely Maid" who, the poet tells us in a note to the poem, was his daughter Dora.¹⁵³ Were it not for the expression of the poet's fear of mortality this poem, like its successor, might seem "wholly dissevered" from the central theme. As Wordsworth contemplated the figure's form and face, they

Remaining still distinct grew thin and rare,
Like sunny mist; — at length the golden hair,
Shape, limbs, and heavenly features, keeping pace
Each with the other in a lingering race
Of dissolution, melted into air.¹⁵⁴

In the next sonnet, the poet compares the sadness and fear produced in him by the vision (an actual dream that he had had) to similar feelings experienced in connection with the future of his country should it be harmed or destroyed. But the knowledge that God can "restore the prostrate" causes sorrow to change to joy and the poet's "spring-time" to be renewed. This is part of the accumulative meaning of the series: through faith and the stoical Christian attitude, one can transcend the vicissitudes of time and personal experience and come to terms with the apparent fatality of existence. In "The Liturgy" (XIX), a sonnet remarkable for its image of the Church ritual year as a mystical circle, Wordsworth proclaims the "King of Glory" as the sole enduring power in a world of inevitable change and dissolution, and in "The Funeral Service" (XXXI), the poet presents us with the orthodox Anglican answer to mutability and death:

From the Baptismal hour, thro' weal and woe,
The Church extends her care to thought and deed;
Nor quits the Body when the Soul is freed,
The mortal weight cast off to be laid low. 4
Blest Rite for him who hears in faith, "I know
That my Redeemer liveth," — hears each word
That follows — striking on some kindred chord
Deep in the thankful heart; — yet tears will flow. 8
Man is as grass that springeth up at morn,
Grows green, and is cut down and withereth

¹⁵³ PWO, III, 568-69.

¹⁵⁴ PWO, III, 385.

Ere nightfall— truth that well may claim a sigh,
 Its natural echo; but hope comes reborn 12
 At Jesu's bidding. We rejoice, "O Death,
 Where is thy Sting?—O Grave, where is thy Victory?"¹⁵⁵

Another fine example of the way in which Wordsworth incorporates his sources into sonnet form is this poem which seems to gain rather than lose by the assimilation of prose material. Wordsworth accepts the Christian faith in respect of death and an afterlife so fully that he "merely" remodels the material of the burial service into his sonnet form. The sestet is largely the funeral service shaped as sonnet, the allusions in lines 9 and 10 to The Book of Common Prayer (based here on the Psalms) included to give Biblical support to the idea that man's life is but a day.¹⁵⁶ This idea we have seen to be part of the meaning of The River Duddon cycle and, in a sonnet of 1831, "The Trosachs" from Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems, Wordsworth uses the same image to emphasize the brevity of life, which thought is inspired by the grave illness of his friend Sir Walter Scott:

There's not a nook within this solemn Pass
 But were an apt confessional for One
 Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
 That Life is but a tale of morning grass
 Withered at eve.¹⁵⁷

Both the quotation in lines 5-6 of the "Funeral Service", also from "The Order for the Burial of the Dead",¹⁵⁸ and ^{that} in the final lines from I Corinthians 15:55, are evoked by Wordsworth from religious sources which bring comfort and hope to the believer in the event of death. Wordsworth does not, however, in adopting material from the Scriptures so completely, offer a mechanical or facile solution to the transience of life. The poem is one of profound feeling especially in that the poet accepts our human illogicality and failings, acknowledging that "tears will flow" in spite of the knowledge that the Redeemer lives. And a sigh, Wordsworth says, is the "natural echo" of the truth that man must die. The quoting in the sonnet is not glib either. "I know" placed at the end of line 5

¹⁵⁵ PWO, III, 399.

¹⁵⁶ Wordsworth: Poems, II, 1015.

¹⁵⁷ PWO, III, 267.

¹⁵⁸ Wordsworth: Poems, II, 1015.

carries a powerful suggestion of certainty, and the quotation from Corinthians in the final lines (the last, a lingering Alexandrine) is a fitting conclusion to a poem that does not seek to glorify death but that attempts, through the art of its form, to provide an answer to man's mortality.

This is Wordsworth's orthodox answer to mutability in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, an answer that receives its most profound expression in sonnet XXXIV, "Mutability":

From low to high doth dissolution climb,
 And sink from high to low, along a scale
 Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
 A musical but melancholy chime, 4
 Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,
 Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.
 Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
 The longest date do melt like frosty rime, 8
 That in the morning whitened hill and plain
 And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
 Of yesterday, which royally did wear
 His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain 12
 Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
 Or the unimaginable touch of Time. 159

Everything is subject to decay, all outward forms of Truth - no matter how ancient or established - from the tower, that most sublime of symbols in Wordsworth's poetry of man's attempts to ward off Time's hand, to all bids to formulate meaning, such as religions themselves, which have persevered through the ages. The tower can be felled in an instant by no more than a casual shout or touch of Time, the evidence of historical continuity evaporated in almost as brief a space of time. Cyclic change is inevitable: from out of decay is new life born, only to be destroyed in its turn. But through an understanding of the vast historical pattern (and in spite of the "unimaginable touch of Time") there is to be discovered meaning in the permanence of process, meaning which, when viewed by the pure in spirit from a position of detachment from all material interests, can reconcile the mind to the relentlessness of change, and even point the way to a harmony inherent in the great system of things. A contemplation of the sense of order imposed on the universe (such as the series attempts to illustrate) can lead us to hear the "concord" which shall never cease. Inescapable is the "melancholy"

attached to the musical notes denoting the pattern in mutability, the regret at the passing of all things; but, in glimpsing the grandeur of the great pattern, we are provided with an escape from the world of space and time.

The predominant image in this sonnet - that of music - is contained, as we have seen it was in "Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland",¹⁶⁰ in a poem whose form contributes to the harmony suggested in the music imagery. It is remarkable that in both sonnets employing this image there is a return of the octave's rhyme sounds in the sestet, of the "a" rhyme in the earlier poem, and the "a" and "c" rhymes in "Mutability". In both cases, Wordsworth appears to continue these rhymes into the sestet to suggest an overall harmony - of the two voices (of the mountains and the sea) in the first poem, and of dissolution in the second where the recurring rhyme sounds reflect the idea of a musical harmony that will never cease. Dissolution is seen to climb from low to high and to sink from high to low in a kind of parabolic arrangement, tower-like in visual form, in a rhythm of change which seems to constitute, for Wordsworth, a law of the Universe which may be perceived by those "who meddle not with crime, / Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care". The changing of states - from "loss" to "gain" repeatedly - produces an "echo" effect, note harmonizing or chiming with note, which is audible if we are in the right spiritual state. This would seem to be Wordsworth's original variation of the traditional diapason based on neo-Platonic ideas of the music of the spheres such as we find in Milton, for example, in "At a Solemn Music" and the "Nativity Ode". The harmony which Wordsworth describes is possibly related to the idea in "At a Solemn Music" that the concord of divine music could be heard by man until the Fall:

...we on earth with undiscording voice
 May rightly answer that melodious noise;
 As once we did, till disproportioned sin
 Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din
 Broke the fair music that all creatures made
 To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed
 In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
 In first obedience, and their state of good. 161

¹⁶⁰ PWO, III, 115.

¹⁶¹ The Poems of John Milton, p.164, ll.17-24.

This idea, Fowler tells us in a note to these lines, is found in Dante, Purgatorio xxix 22-30.¹⁶² Although the music that Wordsworth refers to is that of the pattern to be discerned in dissolution and not of the heavenly host, it, too, unites man with God and is, in this sense, connected with the heavenly scale mentioned in Milton's poem. The "musical but melancholy chime" of "Mutability" is possibly an allusion to "nature's chime" in the earlier poem, especially as it is partly through natural imagery (though based on a more restricted idea of Nature) that Wordsworth conducts the argument of his sonnet. The idea of the spheres producing musical notes (which are audible to the pure in spirit) as the universe revolves is referred to again in Milton's "Nativity Ode" where, once more, the word "chime" appears, indicating a rhythmical note such as there is in Wordsworth's sonnet:

XIII

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
 Once bless our human ears,
 (If ye have power to touch our senses so)
 And let your silver chime
 Move in melodious time;
 And let the base of heaven's deep organ blow,
 And with your ninefold harmony
 Make up full consort to the angelic symphony. ¹⁶³

The image in the last line of the sonnet, "the unimaginable touch of Time", an instance of self-borrowing by the poet of a line from the early "Fragment of a Gothic Tale" (1796),¹⁶⁴ is a further echo of Milton, of the phrase "unimaginable touches" of music from Of Education,¹⁶⁵ sustaining the image of music through to the last line. Part of the secret harmony set up by the process of dissolution is the reverberation of sound which is all that is needed to make the tower collapse, almost as if Time's finger pushes it over with an invisible touch.

In the midst of change and decay, the persistence of Truth remains permanent and immutable: "Truth fails not". The oldest of its outward

¹⁶²The Poems of John Milton, p.164.

¹⁶³The Poems of John Milton, pp.106-07.

¹⁶⁴PWO, I, 288, l.66.

¹⁶⁵Complete Prose Works of John Milton, II, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 410.

forms must inevitably disappear, suddenly, like the fall of the tower, and in almost as brief a time, like the melting of frost. But Truth itself (like an unfallen tower, one may suppose) is the fixed mark as love is in Shakespeare's Sonnets. Indeed, Wordsworth would seem to have had Shakespeare's sonnets on mutability in mind in this poem where the changing states of no.64 of the Sonnets, which increase "store with loss, and loss with store",¹⁶⁶ are expressed as the forces of dissolution climbing from low to high, and sinking from high to low, creating a scale of growth and decay. In both sonnets, too, the tower (a recurring architectural symbol, in the works of both poets, of man's attempts to build monuments that will endure) is seen to be felled by Time's hand.

The concept of mutability as incessant music, "whose concord shall not fail", is expressed in almost every aspect of this poem which is one of Wordsworth's most unified sonnets. Into the music metaphor that is established in the first six lines is worked the weather imagery of lines 8-10 as it, too, represents a cycle, diurnal and yearly, that is part of the uninterrupted pattern. And the sound implied in the "casual shout" and "unimaginable touch" of Time (via the allusion to Milton) participates in the music of dissolution. While the rhyme pattern helps to establish an unbroken "circle" of sound, the continuous nature of mutability is also suggested in the sonnet divisions which work against the normal breaks (the octave and sestet are inverted) and eliminate the expected pauses; and in the rhythms of the poem whose lines proceed at a steady pace, as do the forces of dissolution, unmoved by any efforts to resist them. The music metaphor thus permeates the entire sonnet, echoing, as it were, "that pervading sense of intense Unity" that Wordsworth continually strove for in his sonnets.

In the sonnet "Inside of King's College, Cambridge" (XLIII), the poem which was probably the inspiration for the entire series, we hear music again, this time of human voices united in praise of God. A different kind of music, it is nevertheless related to that of mutability in the sense that each connects man with God and immortality. A poem of extraordinary beauty in which poetry, architecture and music seem to merge as one art form, the King's College sonnet leaves us with

¹⁶⁶ Shakespeare's Sonnets, p.56.

the notes of sacred music that have been sung through the centuries

Lingering — and wandering on as loth to die;
Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality. ¹⁶⁷

To such thoughts has Wordsworth been led through a contemplation of the great pattern of ecclesiastical history. His journey along the Holy River has brought him to accept the life of the soul as enduring beyond the world of ceaseless change, in the same way that his journey along the River Duddon taught him that "we are greater than we know". He has resolved the idea of mutability as an enemy into a pattern of "concord" which, although tinged with melancholy, is music of a great sweetness to those who have pursued the course of the sacred river to its conclusion. This act of coming to terms with mutability and seeking to escape the bounds of natural existence is at the centre of the poetical meaning of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, and of the other two sequences of the same period.

¹⁶⁷ PWO, III, 405.

CHAPTER IV

Few of the individual sonnets composed by Wordsworth after 1820 have received much critical attention, and most none at all. Apart from the well-known "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned" and "A Poet!—He hath put his heart to school", only a handful besides have been referred to in any detail by Wordsworth's critics, and the sonnet qualities of even these famous poems have been given scant consideration.¹ In fact, when sonnets belonging to the latter years are evoked, the purpose is generally to illustrate the poet's fading powers and growing conservatism. Because he wrote in this form more often than in any other form of lyric during this period (usually regarded as one of decline), one can see in the sonnets the general poetic quality of his later work. For this reason, they have been sometimes selected as representative of the uninspired products of an ageing genius whose visionary powers had atrophied over the years. Some, it is true, are less imaginative than the best of his earlier sonnets and others are comparatively uninspired. Possibly those which have the least appeal are the Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order and Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death. In the former group we encounter once again the themes and concerns of the larger well-known collection, Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, and, perhaps because the lack of excitement generated by the immediacy of the threat to liberty in the earlier poems, they seem rather colourless in comparison. As far as the second category is concerned, the subject "Punishment of Death" would not seem to merit a series of fourteen poems, in essence all variations upon the one theme; one feels that Wordsworth would have done better to convey his sentiments on the matter in fewer occasional sonnets of "tense...counterpointed explosion",² or, as Mary Moorman suggests, in a prose pamphlet.³

¹An exception is Johnson who gives close attention to a number of the later sonnets, in chapters III and IV especially, pp.63-119.

²See Ch.II, p.45 of this thesis.

³Moorman, LY, p.535.

But, while the poems in these groups, and others of this period, may lack the quality of imagination that distinguishes Wordsworth's best poetry, they are competent sonnets, always sincere, and not to be entirely disparaged.

Of greater importance is the large number of fine sonnets written in these years which have been too long ignored. A consideration of these, not as poems which illustrate deviations from the poet's primary interests but as poems which instance important variations of these concerns, will help to establish the continuity of the late with the early poetry and, in so doing, contribute to an accurate and comprehensive view of Wordsworth's sonnet practice. In this chapter, I propose, in the introductory stages, to consider, briefly, the types of pattern that emerge in these sonnets, and then to examine a selection of the sonnets composed after 1820 that provide clear examples of the themes, images and related adaptations of form that characterize this chronological group. One may note two areas of topic from which such a representative selection may be made.

Two clusters, each possessing a common theme, emerge from this period during which a hundred and ninety-six sonnets were written that are, in most respects, representative of the poet's sonneteering during the last three decades, and it is upon these that I shall concentrate my study in this last chapter. Members of these clusters are to be found in all the later sonnet groups, including the travel series, and the two classes have been selected for the reason that they contain what seem to me to be some of the most important themes and concerns of this time. Furthermore, choosing sonnets which comment upon, and illustrate, each other and Wordsworth's chief sonnet undertakings would seem to be less arbitrary than taking examples at random from the large number that have wide-ranging occasions. The first of these clusters has to do with the business of poetry, with its subjects and function, and then, more specifically, with the sonnet itself. As such it is an appropriate group to examine at this point as the poems illustrate the direction in which Wordsworth's thought is moving and give us some indication of his sonnet intentions at this time. The second group includes sonnets which celebrate castles or ruins and natural structures that symbolize the themes of ageing, mutability and time. A stoic grandeur characterizes the finest of these sonnets which represent the

poet's attempt to come to terms with death and dissolution. The castle emerges as a type of solitary which has the power to teach an acceptance of decay and loss. In a sense these poems evince an affinity with some of Wordsworth's earlier poems, even though they express the themes of mutability and time in a more detached and elegiac mode. I have elected not to range as widely over this group as I have in the first which embraces a variety of aspects of poetry that does not easily submit to generalization. Instead, I shall concentrate on those few that have, to my knowledge, received little, if any, mention in critical studies and that, in my opinion, deserve to take their place among the better known of Wordsworth's sonnets.

As I indicated above, the next few pages of this chapter will be devoted to examining technique. There is evident in Wordsworth's later sonnets a tendency to experiment in the sonnet genre with a greater freedom than before. This takes the form predominantly of disguising the traditional divisions in new and diverse ways, of an increasing number of irregular rhyme schemes in the octave, and a more frequent use of the final couplet.⁴ In spite of his willingness to experiment, however, and despite his stated preference for having three parts in a sonnet, Wordsworth continues to exploit the potential of the sonnet to juxtapose a passage of description or observation (the octave) and interpretative or moralizing matter (the sestet), dividing the greater number of the poems into two parts.⁵ Increasingly, though, the bipartite structure is complicated by the presence of additional patterns that diminish the force of the major turn and disguise a distinct doubleness. This, as we have seen, has been part of his practice from the start but with the difference in the earlier period that his chief concern was to run the thought and syntax across from the octave into the sestet primarily to avoid a division into two parts of eight lines and six lines each. Now Wordsworth seems to be seeking new effects through different departures from the familiar pattern to make the doubleness even less defined. In the following sonnet, for example,

⁴Irregularly rhymed octaves outnumber those with abba abba and abba acca rhyme schemes. Sixty-seven of the sonnets have final couplets.

⁵Approximately 58% are poems of two parts.

an unusual attempt at disguising the normal sonnet divisions is revealed. While travelling through Italy in 1837, Wordsworth learns at Florence that a marble stone in the Cathedral was apparently a favourite seat of Dante's. A description of his reaction to the seat associated with the Italian poet is given in no.XIX of the Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837, a sonnet that is irregular in a number of respects:

Under the shadow of a stately Pile,
 The dome of Florence, pensive and alone,
 Nor giving heed to aught that passed the while,
 I stood, and gazed upon a marble stone, 4
 The laurelled Dante's favourite seat. A throne,
 In just esteem, it rivals; though no style
 Be there of decoration to beguile
 The mind, depressed by thought of greatness flown. 8
 As a true man, who long had served the lyre,
 I gazed with earnestness, and dared no more.
 But in his breast the mighty Poet bore
 A Patriot's heart, warm with undying fire. 12
 Bold with the thought, in reverence I sate down,
 And, for a moment, filled that empty Throne. 6

The sonnet is divided into five parts, each one end-stopped. Although the strongest turn occurs at the end of line 8, where the focus shifts from the object of contemplation to the poet who loved it (and to the observer), the pause before it in line 5 and those at the end of lines 10 and 12 are felt to be turns as Wordsworth alternately places himself and Dante in the central position in a recurring pattern. The contemplative and solitary state which sharpens his awareness of the greatness of the moment is the subject of the first part. In the second section, the perspective shifts from Wordsworth to Dante as Wordsworth describes the earlier poet's favourite seat. Wordsworth returns to consider himself in the third part, this time in his role as poet (as opposed to the earlier one of a visitor to the Cathedral), establishing the first of the links between himself and Dante. The two poets are drawn closer together in the following section through their shared patriotic sentiments as Wordsworth pays tribute to the man who loved his country; and, finally, in the concluding part, the two poets seem to merge and become one, as Wordsworth, in an historic moment, occupies the "throne" of the Italian poet. The build up to this moment of climax is achieved through a skilful crossing of sense

⁶ PWO, III, 225.

from one section in the poem to the next, bringing first one poet and then the other recurrently into the foreground until, through the contact established by their shared interests and by their having occupied the same seat (by implication that of poetry), they are fused, as it were, into one poet in service of the lyre. An unusual form of sonnet doubleness emerges from this patterning that is both thematic and structural yet does not submit to the conventional bipartite structure in which each unit presents the whole of one aspect of the theme or of one stage of thought. This gives rise to an extraordinary sense of singleness: the concluding idea of oneness seems to grow out of the patterns woven before it, inviting us to review the foregoing parts which then give the impression of being less distinct from each other that they at first appeared to be. The result of this is that the breaks in the poem are camouflaged to some extent and a thematic unity projected to which the return of the "b" rhyme in the couplet gives support. The rhyme scheme of the poem is: ababbaabdcddcbb. (We have seen before, in an examination of sonnets like "Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland" and "Mutability", that the recurrence of a rhyme from the octave in the sestet and couplet is a characteristic of those sonnets in which Wordsworth is especially concerned with a oneness, a unity of sound or a harmony.)⁷ From a sonnet, then, which is irregular in its patterning and rhyme scheme is created a poem that reflects the sense of unity that we usually expect from sonnet.

A second example, "If these brief Records, by the Muses' art", composed probably in 1827, illustrates a less unusual but nevertheless interesting attempt at diminishing the sense of doubleness. In this sonnet, Wordsworth ignores most of the customary line groupings, dividing the poem into three sections, the two turns occurring in lines 7 and 11. With this technique we are familiar enough but, in addition, he creates an impression of three parts in the first six and a half lines that is a further complication of the pattern:

If these brief Records, by the Muses' art
Produced as lonely Nature or the strife
That animates the scenes of public life
Inspired, may in thy leisure claim a part; 4

⁷ See Ch.II, p.64 and Ch.III, p.154 of this thesis.

And if these Transcripts of the private heart
 Have gained a sanction from thy falling tears;
 Then I repent not. But my soul hath fears
 Breathed from eternity; for as a dart 8
 Cleaves the blank air, Life flies: now every day
 Is but a glimmering spoke in the swift wheel
 Of the revolving week. Away, away,
 All fitful cares, all transitory zeal! 12
 So timely Grace the immortal wing may heal,
 And honour rest upon the senseless clay. 8

The first seven and a half lines carry a suggestion of the manner in which the argument is frequently presented in different ways through the three quatrains of a Shakespearean sonnet as in, for example, nos. 12, 15 and 32 of the Sonnets. The skeleton argument of sonnet 15 could be presented thus: "When I consider everything that grows..." (l.1); "When I perceive that men as plants increase..." (l.5); "Then the conceit of this inconstant stay / Sets you most rich in youth before my sight..." (ll.9-10).⁹ The first four lines of Wordsworth's sonnet, introducing the protasis, can be seen to correspond in pattern to the first quatrain of Shakespeare's; lines 5 and 6, presenting the second conditional clause, to the following quatrain; and the first half of line 7, which is the apodosis, to the third quatrain. The idea of a threefold pattern is thus introduced in the first part of a sonnet which develops thereafter to show itself to be altogether a three-part structure, decreasing the sense of doubleness which is nevertheless there. The first part of the poem reviews the sonnets in Part II of the Miscellaneous collection, and the survey gives rise to a statement about Time in the second section. This second section is subdivided; a reflection on the rapid passing of Time is followed by a resolution not to be shaken by the reflection. If, as is likely, Wordsworth had Shakespeare in mind when composing this sonnet which is essentially a poem about the passing of time,¹⁰ then the impression created in the first part of the sonnet of a recalling of Shakespearean quatrains would seem to be a deliberate attempt to superimpose the pattern of the

⁸ PWO, III, 38.

⁹ Shakespeare's Sonnets, p.16.

¹⁰ PWO, III, 431. In a note to the sonnet, De Selincourt compares the image of the wheel of time to Spenser's "ever-whirling wheel of Change", The Faerie Queene, VII. vi. 7.

Elizabethan poem on the first part of a Petrarchan structure which itself does not adhere to the classical divisions. The result is a sonnet whose doubleness, while thematically clear, is not reflected in the bipartite structure in the usual way.

A wide variety of patterns is a more common feature of Wordsworth's later sonnets than of those of the foregoing years including the three sequences. In these series, where the sonnet is sometimes less of an individual performance than part of the sequence, we might expect to find departures from the regular structure. In the River Duddon and Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820, however, only two sonnets in each series have irregularly rhymed octaves; two of the former and five of the latter conclude with a couplet. These poems conform, more or less, to the types that characterize Wordsworth's sonnet practice in general, most falling into two parts, some into three; a few are without any turn or, if one is there, it is indistinct and difficult to locate. The sonnet stanzas (as Wordsworth called them) of the Ecclesiastical series do not differ in any remarkable degree although they are, on the whole, more diffuse than those of the shorter sequences, partly because of the larger narrative ordering of the poem and partly because they do not always require the incisive compression of the occasional sonnet. The percentage of irregular octaves and concluding couplets is approximately the same as in The River Duddon, and the balance of parts within the sonnet rarely calls attention to any unusual patterning. What we do find is an occasional Alexandrine at the end of the poem and, in one case, an Alexandrine with a feminine ending. This is unique, and, given the rest of the sonnet and its sombre topic - the burning of Cranmer - perhaps unhappy.¹¹

Despite what has been said, the sonnets in the sequences of 1818-1822 probably prepared the way for experimentation in matters such as rhyming patterns and the behaviour of parts within the poem. Composing a large number of sonnets in a relatively short time must have alerted the poet to the potential of the form to accommodate different kinds of behaviour and increased his familiarity with, and ease in, the form. Without sacrificing the high standard of craftsmanship that is a mark

¹¹ Sonnets concluding with Alexandrines are II. XXXIX, III. XXXI and II. XXXV.

of the sonnets and, in most cases, without impairing the symmetry of the whole poem, Wordsworth strives for new effects in his sonnets which adhere increasingly less to the formal correctness of the Petrarchan model.

Having attempted a necessarily brief survey of Wordsworth's experimentation with form in this later period of his work, I now turn to the first of the two categories of sonnet proposed earlier - those dealing with the nature of poetry and especially, of the genre itself.

I

In spite of Wordsworth's assertion in 1822 that, for the past twenty years, he had filled up idle moments writing sonnets because he lacked the resolve to put his time to better use,¹² many of his sonnets are, as we know, rated amongst the finest of his works. He used the sonnet, too, to make some instructive critical statements about poetry and about the form. "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room", the first of Wordsworth's sonnets about poetry, was composed possibly as early as 1802, but it is after 1820 that a considerable number of these sonnets appear, among them "A Poet!—He hath put his heart to school" and "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned". Then there are those that comment explicitly on the issues that the poet chooses to make his concern and on what for him are the proper subjects of poetry. As we look at this cluster of sonnets, it must be borne in mind that Wordsworth is not expressing new ideas on poetry so much as re-expressing beliefs that he has stated or implied elsewhere. What he does do is to demonstrate that the sonnet genre does not prevent him from being true to his theories; on the contrary, he can in sonnet enunciate his habitual themes and verify the principle of the need to be guided, as poet, by both "law and impulse".¹³

Two sonnets, placed one after the other in the Miscellaneous collection, inform us of the poet's attitude to public questions and to

¹²See Ch.I, p.1 of this thesis. Crabb Robinson also reports that he and Empson had both spoken of the sonnets as their favourites to which Wordsworth replied, "You are both wrong", H.C.R.: Books and their Writers, II, 535.

¹³"Three years she grew in sun and shower", 28, PWO, II, 215.

interests closer to home. The first of these, "Not Love, not War, nor the tumultuous swell", composed probably in 1823, upholds the choice of the humble and the ordinary as subjects worthy of the poet's lyre:

Not Love, not War, nor the tumultuous swell
 Of civil conflict, nor the wrecks of change,
 Nor Duty struggling with afflictions strange -
 Not these alone inspire the tuneful shell; 4
 But where untroubled peace and concord dwell,
 There also is the Muse not loth to range,
 Watching the twilight smoke of cot or grange,
 Skyward ascending from a woody dell. 8
 Meek aspirations please her, lone endeavour,
 And sage content, and placid melancholy;
 She loves to gaze upon a crystal river -
 Diaphanous because it travels slowly; 12
 Soft is the music that would charm for ever;
 The flower of sweetest smell is shy and lowly. 14

Some of Wordsworth's favourite images are evoked here to convey the feeling of tranquillity that inspires his Muse to sing of pastoral contentment. The time of twilight, smoke ascending from a lone cottage, the river and modest flower are all types of what in "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth called "beauteous forms" (l.23), to which he owes

that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened... 15

The poet does not suggest that he will retire from writing about political questions and the strife of human actions - these have been the subjects of his lyre and will be again - but that it is not only these topics that inspire him. He may also be inspired by the peaceful topic: the relatively inactive, the domestic and private. And, excluding some extensive revisions to The Prelude,¹⁶ his poetic powers after 1820 achieve their greatest expression in poems that have as their subjects this peace and related concerns. When Wordsworth does return to public issues in his later years, it is seldom with the vigour of

¹⁴ PWO, III, 24.

¹⁵ PWO, II, 260, ll.37-41.

¹⁶ In 1831-32 and 1838-39, Wordsworth was extensively revising The Prelude. See William Wordsworth: The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. Wordsworth, Abrams and Gill, p.xvi.

the early poems on liberty and independence. He remains committed to man's freedom to the last but is concerned increasingly to find such freedom through a tranquil state of mind.

In the sonnet just quoted

^ Wordsworth moves through the widespread manifestations of man's passions and struggles at the outer limit of the sonnet to the country dwelling, whether humble cottage or farmhouse, at the centre, where it is seen to be secluded from the tumult and conflict that rage without. The poet shows such a dwelling to lie at the heart of the matter not only by placing it structurally in the middle of the poem but also by suggesting that it is a still centre of calm wherein one can take refuge from the storms of human conflict and passion. There, as symbolized by the smoke ascending towards the heavens and the river travelling towards its ultimate goal, man's aspirations and endeavours are to be found in harmonious forms, and yet free and not stifled by an over-protective environment. They grow in unobstructed ways amidst surroundings that reflect nothing of the confusion in the world beyond and lead him outwards to a contemplation of issues as important to him as any of those enumerated in the first three lines of the poem.

The two areas of poetic subject - the public and grand and the private and humble - are not, however, made to compete. Yet Wordsworth implies that for him the second area is preferable. The music, presumably to be found in the harmony of the countryside setting, "would charm for ever"; and the "sweetest"-smelling flower is a modest one. These two quoted expressions would seem to suggest that the poet finds the topics from this area ultimately more long-lasting in interest, and more delightful, or even more truth-revealing. The Muse, he says, loves to gaze upon the river because of its clear waters, implying that this type of river reveals more (or as much, in a different way) through its transparency as might the torrent or cataract, forms of natural waters in violent action. In other words, the Muse's shift of interest is to an area which will also reveal profound truths.

Wordsworth's preference for the less sophisticated topics is also argued through the verbs used of the Muse. The degree of enthusiasm increases as the poet becomes more engaged with his subject. He begins with "is...not loth to range", moves to "please her", and then to "she loves". From there he goes on to "would charm for ever", and to the adjective of the superlative degree, "sweetest". The Muse thus leaves

matters that are bound up with the grand passions of men to engage herself with concerns that allow for a pleasing freedom and exercise of spirit. There is a suggestion, too, that, there, she would like to linger, a suggestion promoted by the feminine rhymes of the sestet which lengthen the lines and have a gentling effect, and by the liberal use of labials and sibilants in these lines that help to give an illusion of line length, creating an impression of tarrying.

The sonnet "Retirement" was composed about three years later in answer to concern expressed by the poet's friend, Crabb Robinson, at what he felt was a withdrawal on the part of the poet from public life. In a letter to Dorothy (February 20, 1826) Crabb Robinson wrote: "It is a sort of moral and intellectual suicide in your brother not to have continued his admirable series of poems 'dedicated to liberty'", and added that a critic in years hence might write of him: "This great poet survived to the fifth decennary of the nineteenth century, but he appears to have died in the year 1814 as far as life consisted in an active sympathy with the temporal welfare of his fellow creatures".¹⁷ Crabb Robinson seems never to have relinquished this view as, in 1844, he ventured the remark that the sole defect of Wordsworth's character, to his mind, was that he had "lost his love of liberty; not his humanity, but his confidence in mankind...".¹⁸ Wordsworth's reply to his friend's rebuke in 1826 is contained in a sonnet very close in thought to "Not Love, not War, nor the tumultuous swell":

If the whole weight of what we think and feel,
 Save only far as thought and feeling blend
 With action, were as nothing, patriot Friend!
 From thy remonstrance would be no appeal; 4
 But to promote and fortify the weal
 Of her¹⁹ own Being is her paramount end;
 A truth which they alone can comprehend
 Who shun the mischief which they cannot heal. 8
 Peace in these feverish times is sovereign bliss:

¹⁷ H.C.R., Corr. i. 74, p.153, as quoted in Moorman, LY, p.449.

¹⁸ H.C.R.: Books and Their Writers, II, 644.

¹⁹ In a note to "Retirement", Hayden points out that "her" has no antecedent: "the antecedent is unclear. N.C. Smith suggests the word refers to 'mind' or 'soul', as indicated by 'thought and feeling' in line 2", Wordsworth: Poems, II, 1024.

Here, with no thirst but what the stream can slake,
 And startled only by the rustling brake,
 Cool air I breathe; while the unincumbered Mind, 12
 By some weak aims at services assigned
 To gentle Natures, thanks not Heaven amiss. 20

De Selincourt has pointed out in a note to this poem that in matters of style and spirit it recalls Milton's sonnets to Lawrence and Cyriack Skinner.²¹ In its suggestion that the poet needs to fortify his soul and refresh his mind from the vantage point of Nature, it is also reminiscent of the classical pastoral ideal of retirement, frequently expressed in English poetry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If this is the case, then Wordsworth's position, like that of the traditional pastoral poet, is seen to be a happy one: he can, from his place of retreat, understand and view with a just perspective the concerns of Nature and the busy world. He is therefore exonerated from the charge that he has abdicated his championship of man's liberty and that he has retired out of indifference to the welfare of the public world. In his conclusion to the poem, Wordsworth seems to be saying that the mind of the person who is retired to the country is freed from the burden of public concerns ("the unincumbered Mind") and is grateful to God for his condition. Such gratitude, which is pleasing to God, is expressed by means of attempting, albeit rather feebly, to carry out those duties which God lays on men of a quiet, less active temperament, men of "gentle Natures". We are reminded by these lines of the conclusion to Milton's sonnet on his blindness which stresses (for a different reason, of course) that there are services to be performed for God by men who are not actively engaged in carrying out His tasks:

Thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
 They also serve who only stand and wait. ²²

It is entirely characteristic of Wordsworth that, in his affirmations of what he considers to be proper values, he invokes literary tradition to give weight to his own utterance. In the sonnet on "Retirement", he

²⁰ PWO, III, 23-24.

²¹ PWO, III, 426.

²² The Poems of John Milton, p.330.

does not reject the importance of public issues but calmly justifies his choice of the natural world as the right place in which his poetic imagination can work to greater gain.

In a third sonnet from the 1820-1830 decade, "A volant Tribe of Bards on earth are found", published in 1823, the peaceful order of the natural creation is presented, in images of a delicate beauty, as something that is both mystical and profound. Here, once again, Wordsworth is talking about the subjects Nature offers for poetry, and again the emphasis is on its tranquillity:

A volant Tribe of Bards on earth are found,
 Who, while the flattering Zephyrs round them play,
 On "coignes of vantage" hang their nests of clay;
 How quickly from that aery hold unbound, 4
 Dust for oblivion! To the solid ground
 Of nature trusts the Mind that builds for aye;
 Convinced that there, there only, she can lay
 Secure foundations. As the year runs round, 8
 Apart she toils within the chosen ring;
 While the stars shine, or while day's purple eye
 Is gently closing with the flowers of spring;
 Where even the motion of an Angel's wing 12
 Would interrupt the intense tranquillity
 Of silent hills, and more than silent sky. 23

Wordsworth contends that flights of the imagination, if they are towards matters of the moment that are not trusted and tried, will not take permanent shape. The allusion to Banquo's speech in Macbeth (I.vi.7), "coignes of vantage", refers to the jutting corners of Macbeth's castle on which the house-martins build their nests. The irony in Banquo's observation to Duncan that where these birds "most breed and haunt, I have observ'd / The air is delicate"²⁴ is taken up in Wordsworth's description of the poets who, self-deceived, write in enslavement to the public whim. Caroline Spurgeon, in Shakespeare's Imagery, points out that "martin" was a slang term for "dupe" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that, on the two occasions when Shakespeare uses the image of the martlet, he appears to have this association in mind.²⁵ To Wordsworth, these poets whose high-flying

²³ PWO, III, 19.

²⁴ William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p.1004.

²⁵ Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery, and what it tells us (1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952), pp.188-89.

aspirations lead them away, like martins, from the solid foundation of their natural home are dupes in the sense that they allow themselves to be misled by fashionable taste and by flattery.

In strong contrast to the tenuous hold that the Tribe of Bards take upon a man-made structure is the substantial basis of Nature. Here, permanence is to be found in the process of the natural order as the circular imagery of the year's round and the chosen ring suggests. The latter would seem to be the circular nest (taking into account the imagery of winged beings which runs through the poem), this time built where birds should build, away from man and amongst others of their kind; that is, other creatures of Nature. The laws of motion and time are seen to begin one phase of life as they terminate another: "day's purple eye closes" but with "the flowers of spring". In decay there is regeneration. And these laws are productive of a harmonious and universal order. Where the mind is at work, whether while the sun is setting or by night, it toils in the presence of a unifying life that creates a stable pattern, such as is illustrated by the order of the heavens when the stars shine at night.

The last lines describe the tranquillity that surrounds the poet at work in Nature. It is so intense that even "the motion of an Angel's wing" would be disturbing. A movement less perceptible than the almost imperceptible rhythm of Nature's cycles approaching completion, it would nevertheless make itself felt in the stillness that transcends silence itself. The soundlessness which is evoked in these fine lines is echoed in the structure, in the absence of any punctuated pauses in lines 12 and 13 to interrupt the sense of stillness, and in the presence of only two rhyme sounds in the sestet which suggests the simplest harmony. The sonnet is closed with a couplet whose rhymes would seem to suggest silence mirroring silence in the smoothest possible transition of sound. The sense of calm in which the poetic imagination is at work arises from a source deeper than the contemplation of the tranquil scene: it subsists in an understanding of the natural laws, of an organized unity wherein the mind can lay "secure foundations" for poetry.

The themes shared by the sonnets examined above are, as we know, subjects of the sonnets from the start. Upholding the humble and ordinary as topics worthy of poetry is a familiar strain in Wordsworth's

poetry, early and late, and does not characterize the later years only. But a cluster of sonnets does emerge after 1820 which both presents these themes and concentrates on the business of poetry - on actual composition and function as well as subject matter - in what would seem to be an attempt by the poet to explain his position in relation to the form which he is to use progressively more for domestic purposes and as memorials for his travels, and less for matters of public and political interest. If we bear in mind that in 1833 Wordsworth wrote that he had not been able to make up his mind upon the subject of the sonnet in spite of writing so many,²⁶ then the idea that he used the form to clarify its function in his scheme of poetry becomes a reasonable assumption. And the number of sonnets composed after 1820 which are about poetry per se would suggest that the form occupied Wordsworth's attention, in terms of its continuing use for him, in these years especially.

A sonnet first published in 1842 (composed possibly in the same year), "Though the bold wings of Poesy affect", is similar in thought to the foregoing three sonnets. It presents the familiar theme of the worth of modest subjects but in even finer detail than before:

Though the bold wings of Poesy affect
 The clouds, and wheel around the mountain tops
 Rejoicing, from her loftiest height she drops
 Well pleased to skim the plain with wild flowers deckt, 4
 Or muse in solemn grove whose shades protect
 The lingering dew - there steals along, or stops
 Watching the least small bird that round her hops,
 Or creeping worm, with sensitive respect. 8
 Her functions are they therefore less divine,
 Her thoughts less deep, or void of grave intent
 Her simplest fancies? Should that fear be thine,
 Aspiring Votary, ere thy hand present 12
 One offering, kneel before her modest shrine,
 With brow in penitential sorrow bent! 27

The poet shows the lowliest creature and the simplest of Nature's processes to be possessed of a profundity and a mystery, in terms (one feels) of the wonder of Creation, that have a poetic appeal and a function as great as that of sublime topics. The argument of the sonnet

²⁶ See Ch. II, p. 87 of this thesis.

²⁷ PWO, III, p. 39.

is conducted through images of movement which set up a contrast between the high and the low. Among the clouds and mountain tops the poetic imagination "wheels...Rejoicing" and then "drops" from a great height to glide across the plain below. The positioning of the verb "drops" at the end of the line is powerful, emphasizing the distance between the skies and the earth and suggesting, in conjunction with the words "to skim" in the next line, a lightness and speed that convey an eagerness which turns the act of "dropping" into a gain rather than a loss. On the ground the Muse "steals along" or "stops" to watch the earthbound movements of the hopping bird and creeping worm. And at Poetry's humble shrine the ambitious Poet is urged to prostrate himself in company with the lowliest of creatures on the surface of the earth. His thoughts then, it is just implied, will wing their way upward through the act of worship to a position as high as that with which the sonnet opened.

I turn, now, to a brief consideration of the Fancy as it pertains to some of the sonnets which either illustrate this creative faculty at work or comment on it. To pursue the matter in this dissertation which is not an examination of Wordsworth's theories would be beyond the scope of my undertaking or my powers. The remarks that follow are therefore made merely to give a brief context to the relevant sonnets, and also to Wordsworth's references to the Fancy and to the closely related Imagination, without some knowledge of which the first-mentioned faculty cannot be explained. Even so, I approach this area of thought with caution.²⁸ It has considerable philosophical dimensions and there is the added difficulty that some of Wordsworth's pronouncements on theory do not always match his practice in the poems. The distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination is, moreover, not always clearcut and a simple and provable matter.

The topic of the two creative powers was debated by critics and poets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and by Coleridge when he produced his famous distinction between the two in the early nineteenth century.²⁸ Coleridge saw the Fancy and Imagination as two

²⁸ For a summary of these debates, see the entries for "Fancy" and "Imagination", Princeton Encyclopedia, pp.270-71 and 370-75, on which I have based my remarks in this paragraph.

separate faculties²⁹ whereas most English critics and poets, including Wordsworth on occasion, regarded them as the same in many respects or different only in degree. Yet Wordsworth continues to distinguish between them, and to refer to them by separate titles. His objection to Coleridge's interpretation of the Fancy as "the aggregative and associative power"³⁰ was "only that the definition is too general".³¹ Yet his clarification and illustrations of the faculty that follow this remark in the 1815 Preface prove that his conception of it differed from Coleridge's in at least one essential respect, that of its value. For Coleridge, it was in many cases associated with an inferior mental faculty and unworthy of true poetic genius; of Wordsworth's poems of Fancy he had the following to say:

In the play of fancy Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes recondite. The likeness is occasionally too strange, or demands too peculiar a point of view, or is such as appears the creature of predetermined research rather than spontaneous presentation. Indeed his fancy seldom displays itself as mere and unmodified fancy.³²

Wordsworth, however, claimed that "under her own laws and in her own spirit" the Fancy is capable of performing noble functions and that it can even aim at a "rivalship" with the Imagination.³³ He had a high regard for some of his own poems of Fancy and defended them vigorously, often in the poems themselves, as we shall shortly see.

In the poem beginning "Serving no haughty Muse, my hands have here" (1838), Wordsworth implies that the sonnet is an appropriate form for his subjects that are of a domestic or simple nature.³⁴ This poem, entitled "Valedictory Sonnet", concluded the Volume of Miscellaneous Sonnets published in 1838, and it reviews the foregoing sonnets, referring to them as "cultured Flowerets" and "Nurslings",

²⁹ Biographia Literaria, p.50.

³⁰ Biographia Literaria, p.160.

³¹ PWO, II, 441.

³² Biographia Literaria, p.271.

³³ PWO, II, 442.

³⁴ PWO, III, 58-59.

designed to attract the "casual Loiterer". This description would suggest that the poems are creations of the Fancy and not of the Imagination, a supposition that is made tenable by the number of sonnets in the Volume in which the Fancy is evoked. But one has to be cautious when attempting to classify Wordsworth's poems as belonging to one or the other of these two categories; and, not the least misleading of guides at times is the poet himself. The "Valedictory Sonnet" concludes with the lines

If in this book Fancy and Truth agree;
If simple Nature trained by careful Art
Through It have won a passage to thy heart;
Grant me thy love, I crave no other fee!

That the Fancy has been the creative power behind these sonnets is implicit in these lines. This power Wordsworth distinguished from the Imagination in an often noted passage from the 1815 Preface,³⁵ calling it a "creative faculty" like the Imagination, but one which is used for different purposes. The nature of these purposes, as explained by Wordsworth, helps to throw some light on the term as it is used in this sonnet and elsewhere:

Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent. Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination. She recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite.³⁶

The Fancy, it would seem, is not productive of poetry in which are embodied universal ideas and abstractions, and the effects of its processes can be "surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender, or pathetic...." Unlike the Imagination which

in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind
And Reason in her most exalted mood.³⁷

the Fancy is not a revealing power; it is more of a shaping power. With a "flash", the Imagination can reveal "the invisible world" and it is

³⁵ PWO, II, 435-44.

³⁶ PWO, II, 441.

³⁷ Prelude (Maxwell), p.521, XIV, ll189-92.

therefore not typical of ordinary experience.³⁸ The Fancy need not be either, but it often is, and it is without the intensity that allows the poet to "see into the life of things",³⁹ to glimpse the eternal. The effects of its workings, therefore, do not necessarily leave us with the sense of "something evermore about to be" that is the influence of the poetry of Imagination.

If she [Fancy] can win you over to her purpose, and impart to you her feelings, she cares not how unstable or transitory may be her influence, knowing that it will not be out of her power to resume it upon an apt occasion. But the Imagination is conscious of an indestructible dominion; - the Soul may fall away from it, not being able to sustain its grandeur; but, if once felt and acknowledged, by no act of any other faculty of the mind can it be relaxed, impaired, or diminished. - Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal.⁴⁰

The two faculties are, however, quite frequently to be seen at work together in the same poem, as Wordsworth tells us.⁴¹ In 1812, the poet remarked to Crabb Robinson that "How sweet it is when mother Fancy rocks" was almost his "only sonnet of pure Fancy".⁴² In this case, he undoubtedly meant the Fancy as it is defined in the Preface. It is not always as easy to identify, with any certainty, what Wordsworth means by the term, particularly as it appears in his poems. There are times when he would seem to be suggesting, not so much the Fancy as distinguished from the Imagination, but simply "poetry" or the creative faculty of the poet. In other words, the term appears to embrace more than is accorded in his definitions. In "Serving no haughty Muse...", for example, the word cannot, one feels, refer to pure Fancy as it is defined above. The poem looks back to sonnets some of which without doubt reveal the Imagination at work, or are about the Imagination. Most, it is true, are poems of the Fancy, yet the quite substantial number which do not fall into this class require that the term, as it

³⁸ Prelude (Maxwell), p.239, VI, ll.601-02.

³⁹ PWO, II, 260, "Tintern Abbey", l.49.

⁴⁰ PWO, II, 441-42.

⁴¹ PWO, II, 442.

⁴² H.C.R.: Books and Their Writers, I, 94.

is used here (and elsewhere), needs qualifying.

It is in a sonnet that the different effects of the Fancy and the Imagination are illustrated by the juxtaposition of two scenes or sets of circumstances upon which the poet's mind operates to create different expression and effects. "While beams of orient light shoot wide and high", composed on January 1, 1843, places side by side two rural scenes in the Lake District, the first, a valley which shelters the town of Ambleside, and the second, the surrounding hills which support a solitary figure:

While beams of orient light shoot wide and high,
 Deep in the vale a little rural Town
 Breathes forth a cloud-like creature of its own,
 That mounts not toward the radiant morning sky, 4
 But, with a less ambitious sympathy,
 Hangs o'er its Parent waking to the cares
 Troubles and toils that every day prepares.
 So Fancy, to the musing Poet's eye,
 Endears that Lingerer. And how blest her sway, 8
 (Like influence never may my soul reject),
 If the calm Heaven, now to its zenith decked
 With glorious forms in numberless array, 12
 To the lone shepherd on the hills disclose
 Gleams from a world in which the saints repose. 43

The early-morning cloud of mist or smoke, born of the town, does not rise to the heavens but lingers, hanging over Ambleside, solicitous of its well-being. This pall of smoke or bank of mist the Fancy shapes into a "cloud-like creature", endowing it with qualities of life and a delicate beauty that captivates the observer. The word "musing" in line 8 suggests a thoughtful frame of mind, one in which an impassioned state of attentiveness (a condition which is necessary to "feed this mind of ours / In a wise passiveness")⁴⁴ is less evident. The musing poet must be attentive, but here he is more detached or less aroused than the poet whose imagination is involved. The sense of sight is exercised and the quite ordinary cloud becomes extraordinary, but the poet is not led by the senses to a world beyond sense, such as he is in moments of vision or when the power of Imagination is at work. Forming a contrast to this humble scene, although part of it in terms of the tempo-spatial setting, is the lone shepherd on the hills. No

⁴³PWO, III, 60-61.

⁴⁴PWO, IV, 56, "Expostulation and Reply", ll.23-24.

interposing cloud of mist limits his vision of surrounding space, and between him and the firmament, now filled with the glory of numberless clouds, there is established an intercommunication through which he glimpses the world "in which the saints repose". He sees beyond his natural environment, led nevertheless by it and by the conditions of solitude which prevail on the hills, to a world beyond that of natural creation, the "invisible world". The Shepherd of the Lake District, we are reminded by this poem of 1843, has always been, for Wordsworth, an imaginative form, far more so than any shepherd of Arcadian pastoral literature. In The Prelude (VIII, 257-61), the poet tells us that when still a schoolboy,

I felt his presence in his own domain,
As of a lord and master, or a power,
Or genius, under Nature, under God,
Presiding; and severest solitude
Had more commanding looks when he was there. 45

A few lines further on, Wordsworth describes his form as he sees it outlined against the distant sky:

A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height! like an aerial cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
Of the Châtreuse, for worship. 46

And here again, to the poet who is now an old man, the shepherd is still a sublime figure. Elevated above the secluded valley on the hills and by his exalted stature, he is representative of the Imagination, a "higher power / Than Fancy".⁴⁷

The two creative faculties are thus represented by images of contrasting altitude - low and high. The lesser of these, the Fancy, is productive of effects that are pleasing - to the eye especially in this case - but that are without the degree of intensity that accompanies the working of the Imagination. The influence of the Fancy is nevertheless both beneficial and important to the poet who understands that it is part of his poetic invention, as long as the power of the Imagination

⁴⁵Prelude (Maxwell), 319, VIII, ll.257-61.

⁴⁶Prelude (Maxwell), 319, VIII, ll.272-75.

⁴⁷Prelude (Maxwell), 39, I, ll.77-8.

never deserts him: "how blest her sway" he says, if, at the same time, he is able to exercise the creative imagination whose function it is to stimulate and sustain the eternal part of our nature.

A second sonnet which concludes a volume of poems and muses upon what has gone before is "Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes", the final sonnet of Poems Composed or Suggested During a Tour, in the Summer of 1833. Wordsworth expresses a contentment with the work of Fancy in this poem whose quiet, measured rhythms reflect the poet's peace of mind:

Most sweet it is with unuplifted eyes
 To pace the ground, if path be there or none,
 While a fair region round the traveller lies
 Which he forbears again to look upon; 4
 Pleased rather with some soft ideal scene,
 The work of Fancy, or some happy tone
 Of meditation, slipping in between
 The beauty coming and the beauty gone. 8
 If Thought and Love desert us, from that day
 Let us break off all commerce with the Muse:
 With Thought and Love companions of our way,
 Whate'er the senses take or may refuse, 12
 The Mind's internal heaven shall shed her dews
 Of inspiration on the humblest lay. 48

As before, the Fancy is associated with a view or a scene small in scale and limited in height. We are aware of regions vaster than those upon which the Fancy concentrates its powers: "a fair region round the traveller lies / Which he forbears again to look upon". But the poet, at this moment, finds satisfaction in "some soft ideal scene" which, like leisurely meditation, occupies a happy position somewhere in between "the beauty coming and the beauty gone". Issues of mutability and time are not the concern of Fancy; it is given to her to kindle and divert the time-bound part of our nature. As both this and the preceding sonnet illustrate, in Wordsworth's later poetry (excluding The Prelude revisions) the beautiful, on which the Fancy works, comes to the fore and he values it accordingly; whereas in the earlier poetry there was generally more attention paid to the sublime to which a more exalted form of Fancy or a higher intensity of it can respond. The two types of subject can, however, co-exist in the same poem as the "Valedictory Sonnet" illustrates. The Fancy "ambitiously aims at a rivalry with

⁴⁸ PWO, IV, 54-55.

Imagination" Wordsworth tells us in the 1815 Preface, and "Imagination stoops to work with the materials of Fancy" in the compositions of all good writers, and he chooses to exemplify this co-presence of the two creative faculties with a passage from Paradise Lost.⁴⁹

From a consideration of sonnets that present the proper subjects for poetry and conditions which nurture a poet's inventiveness and imagination, we move on to a sonnet published in 1842 that expresses, through characteristic Wordsworthian imagery, the idea that poetry should be vital and genuine, not contrived and artificial in a bad sense:

A Poet!—He hath put his heart to school,
 Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff
 Which Art hath lodged within his hand—must laugh
 By precept only, and shed tears by rule. 4
 Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff,
 And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool,
 In fear that else, when Critics grave and cool
 Have killed him, Scorn should write his epitaph. 8
 How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
 Because the lovely little flower is free
 Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold;
 And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree 12
 Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
 But from its own divine vitality. 50

A dramatic situation is set up in the poem in which the speaker appears to address a fellow-poet or young, aspiring writer whose remark or question concerning a third and absent poet (that by implication precedes the poem) occasions the outburst "A Poet!—He hath put his heart to school".⁵¹ The speaker proceeds through the octave to denounce as poet a writer whose emotional state at the time of composition is simulated and contrived, and who cannot leave the formal mould cast by his predecessors or contemporaries for fear of critics' disapproval and public scorn. The thoughts and feelings of a writer who goes to the "stagnant pool" for inspiration are sterile, and any poem he may produce will be insincere and artificial in every respect. An Isabella Fenwick note to the sonnet informing us of the occasion for the poem

⁴⁹ PWO, II, 442.

⁵⁰ PWO, III, 52.

⁵¹ I am indebted for this account of the sonnet as a dramatic one to an article by Paul Fussell, Jr., "Some Observations on Wordsworth's 'A Poet!—He hath put his heart to school'", Philological Quarterly, 37 (1958), 455-56.

explains that it was the use of the word "artistical", fashionable among contemporary writers, that evoked Wordsworth's scorn:

I was impelled to write this Sonnet by the disgusting frequency with which the word artistical, imported with other impertinences from the Germans, is employed by writers of the present day: for artistical let them substitute artificial, and the poetry written on this system, both at home and abroad, will be for the most part much better characterized. ⁵²

To his companion, the speaker gives the advice, "Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff", which is directly opposed to the precepts and rules by which the verse of the contemptible poet in the first quatrain is written. Contrasted with the "stagnant pool" is the "live current" which, as we have seen in occasional sonnets such as "It is not to be thought of that the Flood", and in The River Duddon and Ecclesiastical Sonnets, is associated with life and freedom, and therefore with genuine poetic inspiration. From the stagnant pool, the faint-hearted poet "sips" the unwholesome water; from the free-flowing stream, the aspirant-poet is directed to drink large refreshing draughts of the water from which natural forms draw strength. Fussell sees, implied in these images of the pool and the stream, the principles of a formal garden contrasting with the organic development of natural forms such as the Meadow-flower and Forest-tree:

Wordsworth delineates two settings, and he places in one, the passionless and stagnant artificial garden of the previous century, the timid poet; to the other, the fresh natural setting of forest and field, he directs the aspiring young poet. Lines 5 and 6 might be paraphrased as follows: "Let the observation of natural forms be your guide to aesthetic structure. Derive your structural principles from the natural, overflowing, vital stream in the unimproved forest, and let the timid poet sip the dead, static water from the artificial pool (of the sort that one finds in a formal garden)." Both the "Meadow-flower" and the "Forest-tree," in the sestet, are set in implied opposition to the pampered hot-house or garden flower and the elegantly pruned and clipped tree of the formal garden. ⁵³

Wordsworth might have had in mind as setting for the pool the formal eighteenth-century garden but not, I believe, this environment alone,

⁵² PWO, III, 436.

⁵³ Fussell, p.456.

if at all. To limit the setting to such a garden is to limit the criticism of artificial poetry to the Augustan period, and this would not seem to be the target of his attack. His note to the sonnet refers to "writers of the present day", and the contrast set up in the poem is between writers of any age who imitate and write purely according to rules, and those who seek inspiration from natural life-giving forms which embody necessary laws. What is more, it is difficult to imagine, taking into account the spirit of the sonnet, even hot-house flowers and immaculate trees sprouting from a stagnant pool. More appropriate would be a scene of decay, of flowers and trees drooping and withering from want of fresh water to sustain life.

Two natural forms, the Meadow-flower and Forest-tree, are presented in the sestet as putting down their roots into soil that allows free growth. The beauty of the first and the grandeur of the second derive from a vitality that is their own. And in the case of the Forest-tree, it is a vitality that Wordsworth calls "divine"; the growth of both flower and tree resembles the functioning of the Imagination, free within necessary and desirable restrictions; that is, organic. This tall, majestic tree and the little flower, symbolic possibly of the sublime and the beautiful, both arise from an environment that stimulates their growth and helps each indweller to realize its own individual potential. Wordsworth is concerned to show here, as he does elsewhere, that the poet finds the laws of his art in Nature; that in Nature the poet can see that organic growth has design which depends on its freedom to develop identity (such as a Meadow-flower or a Forest-tree). The poem grows, but it does not grow without law if the poet is able to "move unpropped upon the staff / Which Art hath lodged within his hand".

Why, one might ask, does Wordsworth choose to illustrate such critical ideas in sonnet form? The appropriate form, he is saying, for a poem is an organic one. Yet the sonnet is a conventional and established mode, one which Wordsworth is known on occasions to have regarded as artificial. Fussell, for example, is of the opinion that the poem is an aesthetic failure because it is written in a "formal mould":

It is rather shocking to the reader's sense of aesthetic congruity to find this poem, with its uncompromising rejection of pre-existent aesthetic archetypes, constricted

within the confines of the strict Petrarchan form.
 This is one poetic occasion on which Wordsworth would
 have served himself better had he scorned the sonnet
 and ventured out of the convent's lonely room into
 the living landscape of untraditional poetic structures.⁵⁴

Fussell comes to this conclusion because he sees the poem as rejecting poetic types established by Wordsworth's predecessors. It is, however, poets who school their hearts and who simulate emotion in seeking material for their works at worn-out sources whom the poet censures. Any form that these poetasters might use would thus not reflect the writer's feelings or thought, whether it be a Petrarchan sonnet or a less traditional structure. When poetic invention is genuine, feeling is united with form, and this would seem to be precisely what Wordsworth is demonstrating in this sonnet. We have seen how he repeatedly manages to suggest, in the sonnet, a moment of process that seems to go beyond the structural limits of the poem, and how he achieves mimetic parallels in the structure. But here he is doing something quite different. He deliberately adheres to the strict classical divisions of the poem - to end-stopped quatrains and to the two positions in the octave and sestet - in every respect but one, the inversion of the rhymes in the second quatrain, to give the pattern, abba bccb. Apparently insignificant, this departure from the norm serves to emphasize the introduction, in line 5, of the injunction, "Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff", which, in every way, contrasts with the precepts followed by the inferior poet of the first quatrain. In his submission, too, to the sense of the octave closing with the rhyme at the eighth line, and the contrast provided in the sestet, Wordsworth conforms to the regular type of sonnet. And yet, in spite of adopting a formal mould, he imparts to the form the mark of his individuality. There is a sense of the sestet growing out of the octave, as the flower and tree grow, if the advice given in line 5 is heeded, and if the formulae adopted by contemptible writers are rejected. The sonnet can be an organic form; it was evolved by man's expressing a "divine vitality", and each poet using it has to relive the form, not just use it mechanically. Wordsworth is not fitting sense to form; the form represents both the discipline that is part of organic growth and the freedom that

⁵⁴Fussell, p.464.

Veins it discovers exquisite and rare,
 Which for the loss of that moist gleam atone 8
 That tempted first to gather it. That here,
 O chief of Friends! such feelings I present
 To thy regard, with thoughts so fortunate,
 Were a vain notion; but the hope is dear 12
 That thou, if not with partial joy elate,
 Wilt smile upon this gift with more than mild content!⁵⁷

The feeling that gives rise to a poem is cast into a perfect shape whose beauty remains once the shape has faded. Its frame is compared to a bubble blown sportively into the summer air which, it is implied, soon discards it. The image is thus of a curiously insubstantial and ephemeral nature, yet it possesses a perfection that elicits Time's sympathy. The thought of a poem, on the other hand, is likened to a stone on a beach, a solid object which loses the gleam imparted to it by the water when it is picked up and kept, but whose colours come up when it is polished. In the case of both the bubble and the stone, something of the original form is irrecoverable but amends are made for the loss sustained. The different natures of these two images would seem to imply Wordsworth's belief (like that of the eighteenth century before him) that "feeling" is emotion subjected to thought, and it is only once the poet has "thought long and deeply" about his subject that the feeling is "modified" and "directed" by his thoughts, and becomes something substantial, valuable and lasting. The thought is nevertheless dependent upon the feeling (it is representative of "all our past feelings") and, in this sense, the latter too will be preserved.⁵⁸ In the blend of thought and feeling, something of the original in each case may be lost but, as it becomes a poetic utterance, an atonement is made for the loss.

This idea of the relationship of feeling and thought is, however, secondary in the sonnet to the metaphorical conception of the structure of the genre that the two images illustrate. The bubble is spherical and so is the stone even if it happens to be irregularly round. (It is usually the symmetrical stone that catches the eye and beach pebbles are generally smooth, rounded shapes.) Each image would seem to represent

⁵⁷ PWO, III, 1.

⁵⁸ PWO, II, 388.

the poet's vision of the sonnet as a spherical composition. Musing on the form in the letter to Dyce, he writes (as I have had occasion to note before) that he saw the sonnet, not as an architectural piece of three parts making a whole, but as an orbicular body such as a sphere or a dew-drop. Unfortunately, he does not go on to explain what he meant by this rather generalized and theoretical image but, as he was on this occasion talking about the sense of unity in Milton's sonnets, we can assume his meaning to be that such a shape embodied for him the wholeness of which he considered the excellence of a sonnet to consist. Carrying the sense over expected breaks to introduce a "variety and freedom of sound";⁵⁹ and making organic connections between the parts, the last returning to the first, would seem to be important contributions to the unity of the poem. In "Happy the feeling", these features are all, to some extent, evident.

The sense of the first part is carried over into the second part, the turn occurring in line 9 and not where it is usually expected at the end of line 8. In the sestet, the feeling described in the first quatrain and the thought introduced in the second are gathered up and knitted together to become the "gift" that is the poem itself (and the poems that form the Volume of sonnets). Structural principles such as these help to establish an unbroken circle of sound and sense which is probably what Wordsworth had in mind in his description of the sonnet as spherical. To attempt to clarify the poet's meaning further than ^{making} these fairly obvious suggestions is to come dangerously close to guesswork, and I do not find it especially helpful to consider Wordsworth's sonnets ^{purely} in the light of the rather elusive image he offers us in the letter; an image which is possibly not much more than an abstract musing. But the poem under consideration does present us with the embodiment, in two images and in the structure itself, of the poet's conception of the form and, for this reason, it can be seen to illustrate an important critical insight concerning sonnet. Faced with the difficulty of defining the essence of a type of poem which poets who use it believe "may have just that variety and unity which is the secret of life",⁶⁰ we cannot afford to ignore a remark made by one of these poets that may throw some light on our

⁵⁹ See Ch.I, p.13 of this thesis.

⁶⁰ See Ch.I, p.9 of this thesis.

understanding of the genre.

Of this group of sonnets about poetry, it remains to look at one which, with "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room", provides us with the most explicit poetic comment that we have on Wordsworth's attitude to the form. Composed after 1820 and published in 1827, "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned" is, like the earlier poem, a direct defence of the composition. The earlier of these two sonnets celebrates and illustrates in its execution the artistic doctrine of the freedom to be found within restraint: the later poem commemorates the sonnet's great composers, revealing, through its imagery especially, the qualities of these sonnets that Wordsworth admired and, in Milton's case, possibly wished to emulate:

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
 Mindless of its just honours; with this key
 Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody
 Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound; 4
 A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
 With it Camões soothed an exile's grief;
 The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
 Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned 8
 His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
 It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
 To struggle through dark ways; and, when a damp 12
 Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
 The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
 Soul-animating strains—alas, too few! 61

Wordsworth points out to unsympathetic critics that the sonnet had been a favourite composition of Dante, Petrarch, Camões, Tasso, Shakespeare and Milton, all of whom won for the form "just honours". At times, as we know, he expressed strong disapproval of the genre, and deprecated his own use of it at a date even later than the publication of this poem. Yet "Scorn not the Sonnet" is a poem of unqualified praise for the form which, in the hands of these poets, reveals its own intrinsic merit.

In an attempt to understand Wordsworth's ambiguous attitude to the sonnet and the need he felt to write this poem in its defence, one must take into account the reputation of the genre in the nineteenth century. Its position in the eighteenth century and at the time Wordsworth took it up has already been considered.⁶² Now, although Wordsworth

⁶¹ PWO, III, 20-21.

⁶² See Ch.I, pp.38-42 of this thesis.

rededicated the sonnet to the noble purposes to which Milton had put it and in so doing won renewed respect for the form, critics (and poets) continued to regard it with suspicion until well after the 1820's and even then not everyone was a devotee. The following extracts from reviews and opinions expressed in the first half of the century help to give some idea of the prevailing view of the form.⁶³ In 1807, Sir Egerton Brydges, publishing the fourth volume of his Poems (which included forty-four sonnets) wrote: "It has been the fashion of late to despise Sonnets, more especially those, which...are called legitimate". Two years later, the Quarterly, 1809 (II, 281) described the composition as "a species of poem which we are by no means disposed to place so high in the scale of merit, as its popularity appears to warrant". Byron's condemnation of the *genre* is well-known: "They are the most puling, petrifying, stupidly platonic compositions", he wrote of the Italian sonnets (Letters and Journals, ed. R.E. Prothero, 1922, II, 379), declaring at the time that he would never write another.

By the 1830's, however, the *genre* was in considerably higher repute than it had been since Milton's reign of influence, and Wordsworth's sonnets were receiving high praise from even those periodicals which had condemned him. The Quarterly, 1834 (LIII, 351) wrote of Wordsworth in his sonnets: "There never was a poet who reached so near to perfection" in "discrimination in thought and aptitude in language". In Blackwood's, 1835 (XXXVII, 720), the following comment appeared: "It is allowed on all hands now that there are no sonnets in any language comparable with Wordsworth's. Even Milton must yield the palm." And, in the same year, R.F. Housman, in the anthology of sonnets which he was compiling (Collection) spoke of Wordsworth's sonnets as having "done much towards diminishing the inveterate prejudice that once existed in this Country against the Sonnet...." (p.v).

Yet, in spite of its change of fortune, there were many critics and readers who continued to regard the sonnet as an inferior composition. J.W. Croker, writing in the Quarterly, 1837 (LIX, 209), represents this view:

⁶³The extracts and opinions cited in this and the following two paragraphs have been taken from A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Sonnets, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, II (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1944), 341-42.

We are no great admirers of the sonnet at its best — concurring in Dr. Johnson's opinion that it does not suit the genius of our language....It seems to be, even in master hands, that species of composition which is at once the most artificial and the least effective, which bears the appearance of the greatest labour and produces the least pleasure....

In the light of this evidence of the sonnet's wavering fortunes in the first half of the century and both the slurs and praises it incurred from magazine essayists and poets alike, it is not surprising to find Wordsworth himself on certain occasions questioning his use of the poem. In "Scorn not the Sonnet", however, there is no indication of the poet's doubts of the form; he is concerned, here, to do it justice and to bring to the notice of the prejudiced critic (whose views he has himself shared in the past) the greatness that can be achieved in the form when it is in the hands of a master.

The small scale of the poem is given emphasis in the nature of the images Wordsworth employs to express the varying uses it was put to (and the different effects it achieved) in the case of each poet cited, but the vastness of its thematic capacity is suggested in the trumpet which the "Thing" becomes in Milton's hands. A key, lute, pipe, leaf and glow-worm lamp all carry intimations, in their size or associations, of the tiny compass of the poem, and yet each conveys distinct possibilities of something that is greater than its dimensions. The notes of a lute and pipe linger; the light shed by the glow-worm is the light of Nature, always for Wordsworth a source of imaginative inspiration; associations of Love surround the myrtle leaf; and the key unlocks the seat of Love. Further, the variety and possibilities of the sonnet's range are suggested by the different images describing it. Such a diversity of images is unusual in sonnet (unless it is a catalogue) whose singleness of theme is more frequently presented through one image or a series of related images; but, here, the variety is deliberately evoked, and to good effect, to illustrate the potential of the sonnet's scope. In a sense, of course, this poem is a catalogue: Wordsworth lists the great users of sonnet, deliberately reflecting in the structure the idea of a catalogue. The end of one reference to a particular sonneteer and the beginning of the next is marked off in each case by a strongly marked mid- or end-line pause and with the introduction of a new image. This uncharacteristic arrangement of syntactical units in conjunction with the modified Petrarchan body and the end couplet of

the Shakespearean model skilfully conveys the impression of a conglomerate pattern representing the types used by all the poets. If one pattern does dominate, it is that of the Milton sonnet: the delayed turn (in line 11), succeeded by a series of enjambments (lines 12, 13 and 14), asserts itself more than any other structural feature in the poem.

Wordsworth ends the survey of sonneteering with Milton who is, for him, the greatest of all sonnet writers. The image of the trumpet suggests that the subjects of Milton's sonnets were noble ones, their influence widespread as the resounding notes of the instrument to which they are compared. It seems likely that Wordsworth derived the trumpet image (probably unconsciously) from Collins whom he knew and admired.⁶⁴ In 1789, he wrote three stanzas entitled "Remembrance of Collins Composed upon the Thames near Richmond" wherein he actually imitated part of the earlier poet's "Ode occasion'd by the Death of Mr. Thomson";⁶⁵ and in 1829, in a letter to Dyce, he claimed that Collins, with Thomson and Dyer, had "more poetic Imagination than any of his Contemporaries...", excluding Chatterton and Pope.⁶⁶ In the third part of "Ode on the Poetical Character", imagining himself in a setting similar to that described by Milton as the approach to Paradise (Paradise Lost, IV. 131ff.), Collins beholds the Oak (recalling that referred to in "Il Penseroso", line 60, as "th' accustom'd oak") on which the trumpet was hung:

I view that oak, the fancied glades among,
By which as Milton lay, his evening ear,
From many a cloud that dropped ethereal dew,
Nigh spher'd in heaven its native strains could hear:
On which that ancient trump he reached was hung;⁶⁷

Besides recalling Milton in these lines, Collins is probably also remembering Spenser (The Faerie Queene, Proem to I, i) who establishes

⁶⁴In the following discussion of "Scorn not the Sonnet", I am indebted to my supervisor, Miss Ruth Harnett, who, in conversation, pointed out some possible allusions to Collins and Spenser and suggested that I investigate the matter.

⁶⁵PWO, I, 41.

⁶⁶LY. 1821-30, p.346.

⁶⁷The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longmans, 1969), pp.434-35, ll.63-67.

himself in the role of epic poet whose subject is war:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
As time her taught, in lowly Shepherds weeds,
Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds, (ll.1-4)⁶⁸

War is the subject, too, of Paradise Lost, and thus the point that Wordsworth may be making via these allusions is that Milton gave to the sonnet epic properties. (Ker, we remember, believes that "the abstract sonnet has the power of captivating the mind like the abstract epic".)⁶⁹ Supporting this idea is the fact that Collins possibly also has in mind, in his description of Milton, Spenser's squire of chivalric romance who blows the magic horn hung on the gateway and so initiates an episode in a quest, as in The Faerie Queene, I.viii.3-4. (It is interesting to note, and it possibly gives some weight to the idea of allusion in "Scorn not the Sonnet", that Wordsworth recalls both Milton and Spenser in an earlier sonnet, "The world is too much with us; late and soon".)⁷⁰ A further point to the allusion to the Spenserian passage (in which the poet says that he is leaving pastoral for epic) might be that sonnet before Milton was often devoted to love and pastoral themes, following the Petrarchan tradition; and now, with Milton, it becomes more often political or personal in matters other than love. Collins, too, it should be noted, is turning away from love poetry, as he tells us in line 69 of the Ode: "From Waller's myrtle shades retreating", Waller, in this case, representing the inconsiderable poets who wrote love poetry.

And, finally, the trumpet image can be seen as an angelic instrument, such as it is in "At a Solemn Music" ("Where the bright seraphim in burning row / Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow"),⁷¹ expanding the allusion to the political sonnets to include those which evince the poet's religious fervour. If all these ramifications of the image

⁶⁸The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser in Three Volumes: Spenser's Faerie Queene, Books I-III, ed. J.C. Smith, I (1909; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p.3.

⁶⁹Ch.I, p.9 of this thesis.

⁷⁰PWO, III, 18-19.

⁷¹The Poems of John Milton, p.163.

are allowed, it becomes a profoundly evaluative one, telling us a good deal about what qualities Wordsworth saw in Milton's sonnets and possibly wished himself to take over in his own sonnet practice.

The sonnets that we have looked at thus far in this chapter all embody critical insights of different kinds that, even when they are not specifically about sonnet, reveal a concern with the capabilities and potential of the form that is not a priority with the early sonnets. The emergence of these poems which contemplate and argue about the nature of poetry or poetical theory would suggest that Wordsworth thought through his own intellection of the genre, in the verse of that form, and that practice of this nature helped to advance his understanding of the form as a true one for his poetic needs. He was, in any case, as Johnson has pointed out, the first major poet to bequeath to the form an inner "life of its own",⁷² to discuss, in sonnet, the nature of the form itself.

II

I have chosen to conclude this study of Wordsworth's sonnets with a small selection from the large number of later poems that have as their themes mutability, ageing, and time. These subjects occupy the poet more than any other in the last three decades of his life and, in many cases, give rise to poems whose elegiac contemplation of human transience is both triumphant and poignant. Some of even the best have, to my knowledge, received no more recognition than a comment in passing, and yet they evince the qualities of excellence that have made many of the earlier poems famous. Such sonnets are, in my estimation, examples of the poetry written in these years which testifies to Wordsworth's continuing genius. As Stelzig has observed of the later poetry in general: "At best it has a mellow philosophical pathos and a stoic grandeur which the passionate autobiographical remembrances of the poet of past time cannot be said to possess."⁷³

As has been noted, there are nearly two hundred sonnets composed

⁷²Johnson, p.63.

⁷³Stelzig, p.644.

after 1820 and, of these (a hundred and eighteen of which are in series), a great number contemplate the themes mentioned above. Prominent among the images which embody these topics is that of the ruin, a structure frequently seen as part of the landscape, giving evidence of both the slow work of time and the healing power of Nature. A contemplative weighing of the pattern of loss and gain that reminds us of Shakespeare's consideration of loss and recovery in his Sonnets accompanies these poems on decaying architectural structures, linking the concern with the temporal of the two poets and showing that Wordsworth's sonnets on mutability probably owe something to the passages on time in Shakespeare's poems. Architectural remains and historical buildings are, of course, centres of interest in Wordsworth's poetry all along, the earliest appearing in the juvenilia: the castle in "Fragment of a 'Gothic' Tale" and the hut of "Incipient Madness" are both ruined structures. In "Guilt and Sorrow", completed in 1794, the ruin of Stonehenge is part of the bleak landscape as is the castle in "The Borderers" (1796-97).⁷⁴ These structures, however, are generally associated with a dark past and with violence, and are reminiscent more of the picturesque scenes depicted by late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century painters than of symbols of the spirit of endurance such as is Peele Castle ("Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont", 1805), and of impersonations of "the memorial majesty of Time" ("Address to Kilchurn Castle", 1827).

In Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems (1831), largely a series of scenes evoked by the memory of Sir Walter Scott, we come across a number of sonnets that are meditations on human transience, among them such poems as "A Place of Burial in the South of Scotland" (III)_^ ^{commemorating a scene} where a graveyard lies, "Part fenced by man, part by a rugged steep". The church which once sheltered the graveyard has long since vanished but the surrounding earth is seen to have taken over the properties of a church, a "Union not sad" as the advent of a new day or of spring shows it to be.⁷⁵ "Composed in Roslin Chapel, During a Storm" (V) links the

⁷⁴ PWO, I, 287-92, 314-16, 94-127 and 128-225 respectively.

⁷⁵ PWO, III, 265-66.

ruined chapel with nature, the wind being the church's organist, "live herbs" sharing the interior with sculptures of the past

that, green-grown,
Copy their beauty more and more, and preach,
Though mute, of all things blending into one. 76

The next sonnet in the series, "The Trosachs" (VI), contains an image that we came across in the "Funeral Service", no.XXXI of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, III: "...Life is but a tale of morning grass / Withered at eve".⁷⁷ In this poem, one feels that the mountain pass of the Trosachs is regarded by the poet as an architectural structure built by Nature, fulfilling a role similar to that of the man-made castle or ruin in other poems. It emerges as a kind of natural temple of the Spirit in which one who has been "Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone" that man's life is but a day, may find the consolation offered to those who see and contemplate the peace of the place, a peace that is worshipful because it reflects that of heaven.⁷⁸

The concern with time, evident in Yarrow Revisited, recurs, though in a less overtly elegiac form, in a number of sonnets from the series, Poems Composed or Suggested During a Tour, in the Summer of 1833, where ruins and architectural structures bulk large once again. One of these, "Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle" (VII), which is examined closely below, takes its place among Wordsworth's best musings on ageing and mutability. Three sonnets on the "Cave of Staffa" (XXVIII-XXX) and one on the "Flowers on the Top of the Pillars at the Entrance of the Cave" (XXXI) form a little sequence that comments on Time in architectural terms.⁷⁹ Clearly the poet viewed certain natural structures, especially those of rock or cliff, as the counterparts of ecclesiastical architecture or historical buildings particularly when these forms of Nature display ruggedness or are so placed that they seem to battle with elements such as wind or water. Such natural forms seem to embody for him the sublime independence and spirit of endurance

⁷⁶ PWO, III, 266-67.

⁷⁷ See Ch.III, pp.151-52 of this thesis.

⁷⁸ PWO, III, 267.

⁷⁹ PWO, IV, 40-42.

that human castles and ruins are seen to possess, perhaps even more so than the man-made artefacts, as they do not require the assistance of Nature (being natural structures themselves) to help counteract decay. In the first of the Staffa poems, the poet, having seen the cave from the midst of a crowd, expresses the desire to be one who might stand alone and absorb

into his mind and heart,
With undistracted reverence, the effect
Of those proportions where the almighty hand
That made the worlds, the sovereign Architect,
Has deigned to work as if with human Art! (ll.10-14)

God has planned and built the cave (as he fashioned the Trosachs, one feels) which, in no.XXXI is referred to as a temple. In the second sonnet, the architectural details ("The pillared vestibule, / Expanding yet precise, the roof embowed") are seen to be of such perfect workmanship that they might humble the best of man's work. Here, the "Structure" is described as withstanding the onslaught of the Ocean in times of storm and living with it, in tuneful harmony, in times of calm. In no.XXXI, the cave emerges as a temple of Nature, capable of withstanding "Unhurt, the assault of Time with all his hours, / As the supreme Artificer ordained". The entire structure, including its adornment of bright flowers (ox-eyed daisies),⁸⁰ is sustained "Through every part in symmetry, to endure", its beauty of proportion forming a mirror-image of the towers of heaven itself.

Wild flowers like those that top the pillars at the entrance to the cave appear, in various of Wordsworth's sonnets, growing on man-made ruins, as unfailing reminders of the renewal of the seasonal cycle and of Nature's healing power. An occasional sonnet of 1840, "At Furness Abbey" ("Here, where, of havoc tired and rash undoing"), part of which was briefly considered in Chapter II,⁸¹ presents a similar union of nature and a "sacred" structure, with the difference that the structure is, in this case, built by human hands:

Here, where, of havoc tired and rash undoing,
Man left this Structure to become Time's prey,
A soothing spirit follows in the way

⁸⁰PWO, IV, 407. In a note to the sonnet, Wordsworth identifies the flowers as ox-eyed daisies.

⁸¹Ch.II, pp.78-79 of this thesis.

That Nature takes, her counter-work pursuing. 4
 See how her Ivy clasps the sacred Ruin,
 Fall to prevent or beautify decay;
 And, on the mouldered walls, how bright, how gay,
 The flowers in pearly dew their bloom renewing! 8
 Thanks to the place, blessings upon the hour;
 Even as I speak the rising Sun's first smile
 Gleams on the grass-crowned top of yon tall Tower
 Whose cawing occupants with joy proclaim 12
 Prescriptive title to the shattered pile,
 Where, Cavendish, thine seems nothing but a name! 82

We are reminded, in this sonnet, of the parabolic arrangement of the rhythms of change (perceptible as tower-like) found in "Mutability".⁸³ A sense is conveyed in "At Furness Abbey" of growth beginning at the base of the structure and climbing up to its topmost heights, counter-acting the crumbling of the ruin. Before our eyes, almost, the decay is worked upon and the ruin restored to a structure which is seen to command appreciation from the observer, its "grass-crowned" head eliciting from the sun the first blessing of the day. A healing spirit that waits upon Nature tenderly ministers to the shattered pile, her Ivy embracing and supporting the outer part of the fabric. Looking upwards, we see flowers, perpetually renewed by the seasons, concealing the rifts in the mouldering walls, and, finally, on the top of the tall tower, grass protects its head and proclaims the structure's kingly resistance to Time. There, too, are the birds who have made the tower their home, yet another link with the life of Nature; and, from the heavens above, the Sun, one power in Nature, greets what the poem has suggested has become another natural being, the ruined tower. The ruin, a symbol of the perishability of human accomplishment, is assimilated into its surroundings by Nature and rescued from becoming "Time's prey". So complete is the restorative work of Nature that man, who originally built the Abbey, is banished from the scene in all but name. (The Abbey was the property of the Duke of Devonshire, head of the Cavendish family.) And the mention of even the name is felt to be an intrusion upon the spirit of the place.

Wordsworth uses the classical Petrarchan form with its two positions, strongly marked, to suggest, in the octave, the growth that

⁸² PWO, III, 62-63.

⁸³ See Ch. II, pp. 78-79 of this thesis.

counteracts decay; and, in the sestet, the emergence as a result of such activity of the rebuilt or restored structure. We have seen how in "Mutability" the slow and inexorable movement of the cycles of change is reflected in the rhythms of the sonnet; in this poem, too, a sense is conveyed by the form of the slow work of Nature but this time running counter to that of Time. The pauses are the expected ones (at the end of the first and second quatrains) and the rhyme scheme is regular, the classic pattern supporting the idea of the predictable cycle of seasons. The rhymes, of the octave especially, are assertive, slowing the pace of the lines and participating in the expression of opposing forces at work upon the same structure. The "a" and "b" rhymes of each quatrain help to set up the contrast between Time and Nature that the poem presents; so: "undoing" and "pursuing", "prey" and "way"; and "Ruin" and "renewing", "decay" and "gay". Furthermore, there is a suggestion in the "a" rhymes, which are all feminine, of prolonged time and the gentle soothing spirit of Nature restoring decay. Once again, Wordsworth shows the sonnet to be an organic form, implying in the structural elements of the poem the theme of growth and decay that the images present.

One of Wordsworth's most triumphant statements on Time is found in a sonnet of 1824, "Composed in the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales", one of three which celebrate his tour to North Wales in the company of Mary, Dora and his friend Jones. The castle is probably Carnarvon: in a letter to Beaumont (September 20, 1824) written from Radnor, Wordsworth mentions that he and his companions spent several hours exploring the interior of the castle at Carnarvon and viewing it from different parts of the neighbourhood.⁸⁴ A crumbling ruin, it was nevertheless for the poet still a "noble" structure. In the poem, it elicits from the Stranger who visits it both sadness and reproach at the evidence around him of Time's destructive forces. But we come to see through contemplating the scene of ruin that Time actually "loves" the castle and has in a sense adopted it, assimilating it into a world of which he and the structure, and not we, are seen to be a part:

Through shattered galleries, 'mid roofless halls,
Wandering with timid footsteps oft betrayed,

⁸⁴ LY, 1821-30, p.152.

The Stranger sighs, nor scruples to upbraid
 Old Time, though he, gentlest among the Thralls 4
 Of Destiny, upon these wounds hath laid
 His lenient touches, soft as light that falls,
 From the wan Moon, upon the towers and walls,
 Light deepening the profoundest sleep of shade. 8
 Relic of Kings! Wreck of forgotten wars,
 To winds abandoned and the prying stars,
 Time loves Thee! at his call the Seasons twine
 Luxuriant wreaths around thy forehead hoar; 12
 And, though past pomp no changes can restore,
 A soothing recompense, his gift, is thine! 85

The castle, once a structure that reflected the glory of human achievement, has been untenanted since man abandoned it to the elements. It has been unoccupied for so long that when man does enter its walls he is a Stranger to the place in more than the sense of visiting the castle for the first time: as a representative of the race of man, he is also seen to be trespassing upon precincts that no longer have need of him and have developed a spirit of resistance independently of the hand that planned and built the structure. The softest footfalls interrupt the solitude that governs its walls, their echo betraying the presence of one who, even though he may be conscious of the awful spirit of the ruin, is seen to intrude upon the world of intimacy that exists between Time and castle. These echoing footsteps, the light of the pale moon, and the "profoundest sleep of shade" carry connotations not simply of ghostliness but of an uncanny quiet that suggests another world, a world to which, "gentlest among the Thralls / Of Destiny", old Time belongs. He has befriended the ancient pile, and man, who abandoned it, has been forgotten. The ministry which Time offers to the shattered ruin is similar to that of the soothing spirit that follows in Nature's way which we saw in "At Furness Abbey". So gentle are Time's touches, however, that the weightless caress of the rays from a wan moon is seen as comparable to their lightness. A mystical sense of Time operating unobserved - almost phantom-like - is conveyed by this comparison whose mystery allows us to think of the "secret" ministry of the frost in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" which is performed in a calm of "strange / And extreme silentness" in the presence of a "quiet" moon.⁸⁶ The "unimaginable touch of Time" that

⁸⁵ PWO, III, 42.

⁸⁶ The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, pp.240-42.

in "Mutability" is all that is needed to make a tower collapse is, in this sonnet, a touch that heals.

The speaker comes to the conclusion, having observed Time's working upon the ruin, that the castle, once sacrificed to Time, has been rescued by that power of dissolution. If a sense of destructiveness lingers, it is man's; for, whereas Time and man are usually seen to have wrought the ruins together, here, Time is said to be kind. The jubilant exclamation, "Time loves Thee!" approximates, more nearly than does any other statement on Time in Wordsworth's sonnets, to the triumph expressed by Shakespeare in the defeat of Time by the poet's love and immortal verse about his love. Wordsworth's answer in this poem to mutability is, of course, not Shakespeare's: in the Sonnets, Time is always the enemy; here, it is a friend. But the victorious conclusion to which each poet comes represents a triumph over mutability. The sighs and reproaches which escape the Stranger change to rejoicing as the realization dawns that Time "loves" the castle. The victory is celebrated by the Seasons who, with skills that resemble Time's own, enlase wreaths of their own making around the brow of the ancient pile, an act which has about it a sense of a recurring ritual, presided over by Time, that is part of the mystery of the restorative handiwork. Time and Nature work together in this poem, and it is in their union that the poet rejoices.

In Chapter II, it was noticed that human solitaries of the kind that we find in The Prelude, "Michael", "Resolution and Independence" and others do not exist in the sonnets. What does emerge, however, particularly in the later sonnets, is a type of non-human solitary, such as the castle, which exhibits some of the characteristics of its human counterpart. One such figure or structure is Carnarvon, perhaps less an emanation of the landscape than, for example, Furness Abbey or Kilchurn and Cockermouth Castles, yet nevertheless incorporated by the seasons into their natural cycle. It, too, possesses a stature that is in some way mysterious as do the earlier solitaries like the leech-gatherer, Michael, and Ruth. One is given the impression that Wordsworth felt a sense of kinship with these architectural structures as he did with some of the human solitaries of these other poems. Such an affinity is nowhere better illustrated than in "Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle" (1833), a castle which the poet knew intimately as a boy and revisited on many occasions, one of which was during the

summer of 1833. It is this occasion, with the memories it evoked of a favourite childhood scene, that the sonnet celebrates:

"Thou look'st upon me, and dost fondly think,
 Poet! that, stricken as both are by years,
 We, differing once so much, are now Compeers,
 Prepared, when each has stood his time, to sink ⁴
 Into the dust. Erewhile a sterner link
 United us; when thou, in boyish play,
 Entering my dungeon, didst become a prey
 To soul-appalling darkness. Not a blink ⁸
 Of light was there;—and thus did I, thy Tutor,
 Make thy young thoughts acquainted with the grave;
 While thou wert chasing the wing'd butterfly
 Through my green courts; or climbing, a bold suitor,¹²
 Up to the flowers whose golden progeny
 Still round my shattered brow in beauty wave." ⁸⁷

In this poem, the Spirit of Cockermonth Castle addresses the poet, now a peer of his, formerly a pupil. Once, their difference in age separated them in the sense that they had not reached the same stage in their allotted time-spans, but now the gap of years has closed and each is aware of impermanence and prepared, by his life, to face death. They are thus united in an understanding of mortality which, when the poet was a child, he naturally did not possess. The irony (that is possibly no more than a poignant reminder) in these words is not lost upon the poet who, although he is caught by his old tutor thinking affectionately that they have become compeers, is soon to be shown that the years left to him are short in comparison to the ages which the castle is likely to endure. The realization that the castle was an ageing structure when he was a mere boy, and that it has not altered while he has, brings home to him their essential difference. Yet, Spirit is addressing Spirit, we are made to feel, one having been taught by the other; and, in this sense, the younger of the two takes on the qualities of the older's resistance to Time and establishes a kinship with his teacher that equips him with similar qualities of wisdom and endurance. Not the least part of their shared interests is a love of solitude which drove the boy to seek out the company of the old solitary in the first place. Then, a "sterner link" united the two when the child, occupied with the games of his age, entered the dungeon and was confronted with thoughts of death in its "soul-appalling darkness". There is no suggestion, however, that the boy experienced fear and we are reminded

⁸⁷ PWO, IV, 23, sonnet no.VII;

of an incident recorded in Book V of The Prelude which was Wordsworth's first encounter with death. In his first week at Hawkshead, when roaming the valley of Esthwaite on his own, he looked on while the body of a drowned man was recovered from the lake:

At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre shape
Of terror; yet no soul-debasing fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before...⁸⁸

Vivid scenes of death he had come across before "among the shining streams / Of faery land, the forest of romance", in books whose treatment of these scenes taught the young Wordsworth to see in death "grace" and "dignity" and prepared him to meet it without fear. The sight of the drowned man's face which would terrify most children left him in awe of the experience but did not evoke terror. Becoming acquainted with the idea of death in the dungeon of Cockermouth castle, under the tutorship of that structure's spirit, was no doubt equally awe-inspiring and instructive and similarly without fear. The experience was of a fruitful and enduring nature, it is implied, in that the poet, now of advancing years, stands prepared (with the help of his instructor) to meet death.

An idea is created of the boy receiving the kind of education from the castle that equips him with the spirit of independence, such as his tutor possesses and such, too, as he has learned from Nature. The two - Nature and the castle - are seen to be, in many ways, synonymous: the child chased the butterfly through the old structure's "green courts" and climbed up the crumbling walls to reach the flowers, "golden progeny" of Cockermouth castle, which adorn his hoary brow. Nature has once again assimilated a ruin into its surrounding landscape and, in this sense, the old castle can be seen as a tutor appointed by Nature herself. As such, he is a teacher who will survive to instruct children long after the child of the poem has vanished. The poet's implied respect for the spirit of endurance which ancient structures like Cockermouth castle evince receives expression in another sonnet from the 1833 Tour series, "At Bala-Sala, Isle of Man" (XX). Here,

⁸⁸ Prelude (Maxwell), p.195, ll.448-54.

the speaker, an old man who seeks repose at a beautiful convent ruin sheltered by ancient trees, contemplates the tower of the structure, another shattered and weathered solitary figure:

And when I note
 The old Tower's brow yellowed as with the beams
 Of sunset ever there, albeit streams
 Of stormy weather-stains that semblance wrought,
 I thank the silent Monitor, and say
 "Shine so, my aged brow, at all hours of the day!"⁸⁹

Such a figure would the poet like to be and, indeed, we feel him to be, sharing in the spiritual life of the castles and ruins that he celebrates.

The themes of ageing and mutability are presented in the Cockermouth sonnet through a series of thematic and structural contrasts. In the first part of the poem, the verbs and adjectival participles suggest the static nature of the lives of both the poet and his architectural counterpart. Words such as "look'st", "think", "Prepared" and "stood" all imply the mental activities of meditation and contemplation that are suited to old age. The second part of the poem sets up a strong contrast with the first, again in the verbs and adjectives which present the opposing activities of youth and suggest vigour and adventure. A "bold" suitor, "climbing" and "chasing" the "wing'd" butterfly in the "green" and "golden" precincts of the castle, the boy pursues his youthful pleasures. The vivid colours of the butterfly's wings seem to draw our attention to the sombre darkness and implied colourlessness of the dust in the octave while the fluttering and darting movements of the creature itself on the wing are placed in opposition to the act of "sinking" in line 4 (as is the climbing of the boy). The numerous pauses which in the opening lines of the poem help to create an effect of a weighty utterance, supporting the sense of the lines, give way to fewer intervals in the last lines which reflect the joyful and physical nature of the child's play and the renewed growth of Nature around the castle's brow. There is an attempt, however, to prevent these contrasts from falling into two clearly defined areas of time in, firstly, the deliberately disguised turn. The statement, "Not a blink of light was there", serves as a transitional phrase, linking the two parts and

⁸⁹ PWO, IV, 35.

helping to obscure a break, in that it appears to belong to both parts. And, secondly, an earlier turn in line 5 and a later pause at the end of line 10 contribute to the impression of diminished doubleness. Through these structural devices we are led to feel that there has been a telescoping of time (bringing the older poet and the boy closer together) and that, although the man and the child are separated by the intervening years, these years are seen to be no time at all in the light of the age of the castle which has remained the same throughout the life of the man.

"Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle" presents, in a thoroughly realistic manner, the poet's attitude to ageing and mutability. Faced with the brevity of life, he stands prepared to "sink / Into the dust", an event that he accepts stoically, having learned from the spirit of the castle the qualities of endurance and independence. The realism of his vision, however, in no way obscures the romance of the relationship between poet and castle and the spiritual force of the address of the ancient place. The poem is a moving statement, combining philosophical insight with lyrical emotion and touching the chord of mutability with a pensive sadness - a statement which we feel must take its place among the best of Wordsworth's utterances on time.

In the conclusion to Chapter I of this study, I mentioned briefly the services that Wordsworth rendered to the sonnet by rescuing it from trivial usage and by restoring to it the respect that it had enjoyed in Milton's hands. Wordsworth's admiration of some of Milton's sonnets first tempted him to write in the form and, in the early sonnets particularly, as Chapter II attempts to show, his indebtedness to that poet is considerable. This is especially apparent in the sonnets on liberty although not entirely limited to them. These early sonnets are evoked more than any others by critics (although some recent studies have ventured farther afield) as examples of Wordsworth's genius in the form, with the result that a tendency has developed to judge his sonnets on the performance of a group that does not reflect all of his sonnet concerns and themes, or the structural patterns that emerge in later years; and with the result, also, that the sequences and the occasional sonnets written after about 1820 remain, to a certain extent, neglected. Amongst these are

some fine poems, as this and the previous chapter seek to illustrate, that evince less of the Miltonic influence and more in the way of experimentation. Through such experimentation, Wordsworth evolved different techniques and devised variations on his earlier sonnet patterns to meet his needs as they both developed and altered. And, as the excellence of many of his poems allows us to believe, he continued to bring to the form the best of his technical skill. What he shows us in his five hundred and thirty-five sonnets is that the sonnet form, in the blend that it offers of restriction (or discipline) and freedom, can have an organic quality in the hands of a poet whose Art remembers Nature and who has understood and exploited some of Nature's possibilities. Wordsworth's sustainment of a skilled performance, over a period of nearly fifty years, in over five hundred sonnets many of which reflect his genius, constitutes, in my view, a major poetic accomplishment that allows us to place him near the front of the ranks of great English sonneteers. It would be a fitting tribute, indeed, if a sonneteer of Wordsworth's stature were to celebrate the poet's achievements in a sonnet like "Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned", bringing up to date the list of the masters of the genre with the name of the romantic poet.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- De Selincourt, E., and Helen Darbishire, ed. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Vol. I (1940); Vol. III (1946); Vols. II, IV and V, rev. ed. (1952-59).
- De Selincourt, Ernest. The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935.
- , ed. The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth : The Middle Years. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937.
- , ed. The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth : The Later Years. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939.
- , ed. Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth. 2 vols. 2nd ed. 1941; rpt. Connecticut: Archon, 1970.
- De Sélincourt (sic), Ernest, introd. Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes: The Fifth Edition (1835). 1906; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977.
- Hayden, John O., ed. William Wordsworth : Poems. 2 vols. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.
- Maxwell, J.C., ed. William Wordsworth : The Prelude. rev. ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.
- Owen, W.J.B., and Jane Worthington Smyser, ed. The Prose Works of William Wordsworth. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- Peacock, Markham L., Jr., ed. The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth. 1950; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969.
- Wordsworth, Jonathan, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, ed. William Wordsworth : The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850. London: Norton, 1979.

Secondary Sources

- Abrams, M.H. The Mirror and The Lamp : Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. 1953; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977.
- Adams, Hazard. The Contexts of Poetry. London: Methuen, 1963.
- Alexander, Peter, ed. William Shakespeare : The Complete Works. London: Collins, 1951.

- Aubin, Robert Arnold. Topographical Poetry in XVIII-Century England.
MLA Revolving Fund Series, No. 6. 1936; rpt. New York: Kraus
Reprint, 1966.
- Baker, Carlos, ed. William Wordsworth's "The Prelude" with a Selection
from the Shorter Poems, the Sonnets, "The Recluse", and "The
Excursion", and Three Essays on "The Art of Poetry". New York:
Holt, 1948.
- Bateson, F.W. Wordsworth : A Re-Interpretation. 2nd ed. London:
Longmans, 1963.
- Batho, Edith C. The Later Wordsworth. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ.
Press, 1933.
- Beatty, Arthur. William Wordsworth : His Doctrine and Art in Their
Historical Relations. 3rd ed. Madison: Wisconsin Univ. Press,
1960.
- Beer, John. Wordsworth and The Human Heart. London: MacMillan, 1978.
- , Wordsworth in Time. London: Faber, 1979.
- Blunden, Edmund, and Bernard Mellor, ed. Wayside Sonnets 1750-1850.
Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1971.
- Booth, Stephen. An Essay on Shakespeare's "Sonnets". 1969; rpt.
New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971.
- , ed. Shakespeare's Sonnets. New Haven: Yale Univ Press,
1977.
- Brower, Reuben A. The Poetry of Robert Frost : Constellations of
Intention. 1963; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968.
- Bullock, Walter L. "The Genesis of the English Sonnet Form". PMLA,
38 (1923), 729-44.
- Campbell, Oscar James. "Wordsworth's Conception of the Esthetic
Experience". In Wordsworth and Coleridge : Studies in Honor of
George McLean Harper. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 1939; rpt. New
York: Russell, 1962, pp.26-46.
- Carey, John, and Alastair Fowler, ed. The Poems of John Milton.
London: Longmans, 1968.
- Chalker, John. The English Georgic : A Study in the Development of
a Form. London: Routledge, 1969.
- Coleridge, Ernest Hartley, ed. The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor
Coleridge. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912.
- Danby, John F. The Simple Wordsworth : Studies in the Poems 1797-1807.
London: Routledge, 1960.
- Davis, Charles G. "The Structure of Wordsworth's Sonnet 'Composed
Upon Westminster Bridge'". English, 19 (1969), 18-21.

- De Sélencourt (sic), Ernest, ed. Spenser's Minor Poems. Corr. ed. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960.
- Durrant, Geoffrey. Wordsworth and the Great System : A Study of Wordsworth's Poetic Universe. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970.
- . William Wordsworth. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969.
- Evans, Maurice. English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century. 2nd rev. ed. London: Hutchinson, 1967.
- Fairchild, Hoxie Neale. Religious Trends in English Poetry, 1780-1830. Vol. III. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1949.
- Ferry, David. The Limits of Mortality : An Essay on Wordsworth's Major Poems. Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959.
- Fuller, John. The Sonnet. The Critical Idiom, No. 26. London: Methuen, 1972.
- Fussell, Paul, Jr. Poetic Meter and Poetic Form. New York: Random House, 1965.
- . "Some Observations on Wordsworth's 'A Poet!-He hath put his hearth to school'". Philological Quarterly, 37 (1958), 454-64.
- Gilfillan, Rev. George, ed. The Poetical Works of William Lisle Bowles. 2 vols. Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1855.
- Griggs, Earl Leslie, ed. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
- Grossart, Rev. Alexander B., ed. The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel. London: Hazell, 1885. Vol. II.
- Hamer, Enid. The Metres of English Poetry. London: Methuen, 1930.
- Harper, George McLean. William Wordsworth : His Life, Works, and Influence. London: Murray, 1929.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. "Blessing the Torrent : On Wordsworth's Later Style". PMLA, 93 (1978), 196-204.
- . Wordsworth's Poetry : 1787-1814. 1964; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971.
- Harvey, G.M. "The Design of Wordsworth's Sonnets". Ariel, 6 (1975), 78-90.
- Havens, Raymond D. "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets". PMLA, 63 (1948), 751-52.
- . The Mind of a Poet : A Study of Wordsworth's Thought. 1941; rpt. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967. Vol. I.
- . The Influence of Milton on English Poetry. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1922.

- Hernstein Smith, Barbara. Poetic Closure : A Study of How Poems End. Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1968.
- Hill, Alan G. "On the Date and Significance of Wordsworth's Sonnet 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic'". Review of English Studies, 30 (1979), 441-45.
- Honigmann, E.A.J., ed. Milton's Sonnets. London: MacMillan, 1966.
- Hubler, Edward. The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952.
- Hunt, Bishop C., Jr. "Wordsworth, Haydon, and the 'Wellington' Sonnet". Princeton University Library Chronicle, 36 (1975), 111-32.
- Johnson, Lee M. Wordsworth and the Sonnet. Anglistica, Vol. 19. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1973.
- Jones, Emrys, ed. Henry Howard Earl of Surrey : Poems. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- Jones, Peter, ed. Shakespeare : The Sonnets. A Casebook. London: MacMillan, 1977.
- Kalstone, David. Sidney's Poetry : Contexts and Interpretations. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967.
- Ker, W.P. Form and Style in Poetry : Lectures and Notes. Ed. R.W. Chambers. 1928; rpt. London: MacMillan, 1966.
- Knight, G. Wilson. The Starlit Dome : Studies in the Poetry of Vision. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941.
- Kroeber, Karl. "A New Reading of 'The World Is Too Much With Us'". Studies in Romanticism, 2 (1963), 183-188.
- . Romantic Landscape Vision : Constable and Wordsworth. Madison: Wisconsin Univ. Press, 1975.
- Lee, Sidney, ed. Elizabethan Sonnets. 2 vols. London: Constable, 1904.
- Leishman, J.B. Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets. Hutchinson University Library, 2nd ed. London: Hutchinson, 1963.
- Lever, J.W. The Elizabethan Love Sonnet. London: Methuen, 1956.
- Lewis, C.S. English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954.
- Lewis, C. Day, trans. The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966.
- Lonsdale, Roger, ed. The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith. London: Longmans, 1969.
- MacEachen, Dougal B. "Wordsworth's 'Beauteous Evening'". Notes and Queries, (1959), 318-19.

- MacLean, Kenneth. Agrarian Age : A Background for Wordsworth. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950.
- Marsh, Florence. Wordsworth's Imagery : A Study in Poetic Vision. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952.
- Martin, John S. "Wordsworth's Echoes". English Language Notes, 5 (1968), 186-92.
- McNulty, John Bard. "Milton's Influence on Wordsworth's Early Sonnets". PMLA, 62 (1947), 745-51.
- Moorman, Mary. William Wordsworth : A Biography. The Early Years, 1770-1803. 1957; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969.
- . William Wordsworth : A Biography. The Later Years, 1803-1850. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965.
- Morley, Edith J., ed. Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers. 3 vols. London: Dent, 1938.
- Muir, Kenneth, and Patricia Thomson, ed. Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1969.
- Muir, Kenneth. Shakespeare's Sonnets. London: Allen & Unwin, 1979.
- Nichols, J.G. The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney. An Interpretation in the Context of his Life and Times. Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1974.
- Nowottny, Winifred M.T. "Formal Elements in Shakespeare's Sonnets : Sonnets I-VI". Essays in Criticism, II (1952), 76-84.
- Partridge, Eric, ed. The Three Warton's : A Choice of their Verse. London: Scholartis Press, 1927.
- Perkins, David. Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964.
- Preminger, Alex, Frank J. Warnke, and O.B. Hardison, Jr., ed. Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics. New York: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975.
- Ringler, William A., Jr., ed. The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Rollins, Hyder Edward, ed. A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare : The Sonnets. Vol. II. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1944.
- Rudenstine, Neil L. Sidney's Poetic Development. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967.
- Saintsbury, George. A History of English Prosody. London: MacMillan, 1906. Vol. I.
- Salveson, Christopher. The Landscape of Memory : A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry. 1965; rpt. London: Arnold, 1970.

- Scoggins, James. Imagination and Fancy : Complementary Modes in the Poetry of Wordsworth. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Shackford, Martha Hale. Wordsworth's Interest in Painters and Pictures. 1945; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1976.
- Sirluck, Ernest, ed. Complete Prose Works of John Milton. Vol. II. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959.
- Smart, J.S. The Sonnets of Milton. 1921; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- Smith, Barbara Hernstein. See Hernstein Smith, Barbara.*
- Smith, J.C., ed. The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser in Three Volumes : Spenser's Faerie Queene, Books I-III. Vol. I. 1909; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961.
- . The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser in Three Volumes : Spenser's Faerie Queene, Books IV-VII. Vol. II. 1909; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961.
- Spurgeon, Caroline F.E. Shakespeare's Imagery, and what it tells us. 1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952.
- Starr, H.W., and J.R. Hendrickson, ed. The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray : English, Latin and Greek. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- Stelzig, Eugene L. "Mutability, Ageing and Permanence in Wordsworth's Later Poetry". SEL, 19 (1979), 623-44.
- Thale, Rose Marie. "Crabbe's Village and Topographical Poetry". JEGP, 55 (1956), 618-23.
- Thompson, John. The Founding of English Metre. London: Routledge, 1961.
- Tomlinson, Charles. The Sonnet : Its Origin, Structure and Place in Poetry. London: Murray, 1874.
- Watson, George, ed. Samuel Taylor Coleridge : Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions. rev. ed. London: Dent, 1975.
- Watson, J.R. Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry. London: Hutchinson Educational, 1970.
- Wilcox, Stewart C. "Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets". PMLA, 69 (1954), 131-41.
- Wilkins, E.H., "The Invention of the Sonnet". Modern Philology, 13 (1915), 463-94.
- Woodring, Carl R. "On Liberty in the Poetry of Wordsworth". PMLA, 70 (1955), 1033-48.
- . Wordsworth. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968.
- Wordsworth, Christopher. Memoirs of William Wordsworth. 2 vols. London: Moxon, 1851.